

# The End Of The Beginning

The Complete Guide to Future Events as Revealed in the Bible

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Every Yet-To-Be Fulfilled Prophecy Explored

## Volume III The Millennium and Beyond

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## The Millennium and Beyond

I take great comfort in the fact that the revelation of Biblical prophecy doesn't conclude with the Tribulation—with the Battle of Armageddon, the defeat of the Antichrist, the incarceration of the devil, and the end of the reign of evil in our world. To have done so would have been tantamount to defining “peace” as the absence of war—and as anyone who has ever experienced personal, inner turmoil can tell you, there's a whole lot more to it than that. God's plan is not merely to suppress wickedness in this world. It is to provide genuine *peace*—expressed with the familiar Hebrew word *shalom*: completeness or wholeness, soundness, welfare, peace, happiness, health, prosperity, or safety. It's an entirely positive concept that only incidentally implies the absence of evil.

Such *shalom* has been experienced only sporadically since the fall of Adam—just enough to give us a taste of what it might be like to have it all the time, implanting a longing in our souls for “how it ought to be.” This state of affairs did not come as a surprise to our Creator, who, if we were astute enough to realize it, told us this would be the case even before we sinned. He informed us—in blatantly symbolic language—that He “worked” for six days creating our universe, and then set aside the seventh day for “rest.” He repeated (and codified) the principle in the law of the Sabbath (the Fourth Commandment), and reinforced the six-plus-one formula in a myriad of other ways throughout scripture. If there is a numerical expression for the plan of God for humanity, this is surely it: *perfection*—six of one thing, followed by one of another.

And so it is that the Bible speaks of a time when the resurrected redeemed will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. This “Millennium,” as it turns out, is the last of *seven* millennia since the fall of Adam. After six thousand years of “working it out” in our sinful state, mankind will enjoy a final Millennium of “rest” in Christ. Yahweh's six-plus-one pattern, it turns out, is the key to His timeline for the redemption of man.

The Millennial reign of King Yahshua will be a time unlike anything the world has ever seen (especially since we left the Garden of Eden). It will be characterized by everything man ever said he wanted: perfect peace, prosperity, health, and longevity—freedom from fear and want, and eventually from death itself. Modern man, of course, would like to have all of those things without the inconvenient, convicting presence of the God who created them and provides them to us. But after trying his best for the past six thousand years, man has proven beyond the shadow of a doubt that he is woefully incapable of helping

himself—that left to his own devices, he invariably becomes the problem, not the solution.

The final age of man on the earth will begin with our Creator “judging” it. This, in Biblical parlance, has less to do with condemnation (as it sounds in English) and more to do with judicial deliberation—the separation of the good from the bad, the faithful from the godless, the solution from the problem, or as Yahshua put it, the sheep from the goats. As it was in the days of Noah, no one will enter the Messianic Kingdom who isn’t a child of Yahweh. But if you’ll recall, a few generations after the flood, mankind—Noah’s descendents—had once again rebelled against God: Nimrod’s Babylonian legacy haunts us to this day. Can that happen again? No. Here’s why:

First (and most obviously), God Himself—in the person of Yahshua the glorified Messiah—will rule the earth *personally*, with a rod (or scepter) of iron. Although this *sounds* harsh (and *will be* to those who rebel against the King) please recall that the rod is a shepherd’s implement; it is used to guide the sheep in the path of provision (as the “staff” is used to get the sheep out of trouble). Remember Psalm 23:4? **“I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff comfort me.”** If we are Yahweh’s “sheep,” His “rod of iron” will bring us comfort, provision, restoration, goodness, and mercy, even if we’re not too bright. The Shepherd King will reign in Jerusalem over the whole earth, and after Yahweh’s four thousand year on-again, off-again relationship with Abraham’s children, they—Israel—will at last find themselves at perfect peace with God, reconciled and restored, just as the prophets predicted.

The second fundamental difference between the post-flood era and the Millennial Kingdom is that it will be populated by *two* human races. Those deemed “sheep” at the close of the Tribulation, as well as the newly repentant remnant of Israel (one third of their original number, if I’m reading Zechariah correctly) will enter the Kingdom as mortals, with souls and spirits within bodies of flesh like you and I now have. But think back to the extensive body of scriptural information we’re given concerning the rapture. Before the Tribulation even begins, the church (up through the Philadelphian permutation) as well as the redeemed of all previous ages—Jews and gentiles—will have been **“caught up together...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”** (I Thessalonians 4:17) **“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”** (I Corinthians 15:51-53) That’s the *second* human race: the immortals. By the time the Millennium commences, another group of transformed redeemed immortals—the martyrs of the Tribulation, the church of repentant Laodicea, and the slain of believing Israel—

will join us: **“Then I [John] saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”** (Revelation 20:4; cf. Revelation 6:9-11)

So dead or alive, mortal or immortal, *everyone since Adam* who had placed his or her trust in Yahweh’s promise (which we later came to understand was the saving blood of His Messiah) is found here, populating the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. Two human races, living side by side, will experience what it is to dwell in a perfect world. I have a feeling that we immortals will take on the role of mentors and counselors to the Millennial mortals. And, if I may read between the lines, I suspect that we might also serve as “beat cops,” patrolling the world and confronting crime before it has a chance to happen. Because mortals will still populate the world, bearing children until the “earth is replenished,” it seems certain that some of those mortal offspring will choose not to honor the King or obey His instructions. For the sake of the law-abiding mortals, the sins of these rebels will not be allowed to flower in the Millennial Kingdom (as they do today). Who will prevent the sins of the new generations from taking root? Although we aren’t told, it seems logical that King Yahshua might assign the task of “peacekeeping” to the immortals (perhaps with a little angelic backup), since we will no longer be burdened with a sin nature ourselves.

One of the most revealing facets of Millennial eschatology is developed at length in the latter chapters of the book of Ezekiel. Here we are given a detailed description of the Millennial temple, its design, structure, and service—including the reinstated temple sacrifices. That one puzzled me for a while: why would Yahweh reinstitute Torah-style blood sacrifices, when the Messiah they were designed to predict is standing right there for all to see, reigning in power and glory?

The answer is in the demographics, the culture, and the environment of the Millennial world. Though born with the same sin nature that has plagued everyone since Adam, the Millennial mortals born during the Kingdom age will have a terrible time comprehending what Yahweh’s Anointed One did for them. Living in a perfect society, where the consequences of guilt are hidden to a large degree, the concept of the Innocent giving His life to atone for the sins of the guilty (so that he might stand vindicated before a holy God) will be as opaque as anything in their experience. So the temple sacrifices will be reinstated—for roughly the same reason they were mandated in the first place: to reveal the incredible lengths to which God went on our behalf in order to reconcile us to Himself. The Torah looked forward to the Messiah; the Millennial temple service will serve as a retrospective of what He achieved.

The scriptures don't have too much to say about the celebration of the Torah's seven holy convocations of Yahweh—the so-called “feasts of Israel”—with one notable exception. The seventh and final appointment with God, the Feast of Tabernacles, is specifically said to be a mandatory holiday, one to be celebrated by the entire world. The reason for this is patently obvious: *this* “feast” is being fulfilled before their very eyes by the Millennial Kingdom itself. As described in Leviticus 23, the Feast of Tabernacles (or *Sukkot*) requires the building of temporary booths or shelters in which the celebrants are supposed to “camp out” for the entire week of the holiday in “the place where Yahweh chooses to make His name abide.” The imagery is that of God Himself leaving heaven and “camping out” among men as the glorified Messiah-King for a thousand years.

The convocation is unique in one other respect: it is an *eight day* feast. Seven is the number symbolically indicating completion or perfection in Yahweh's plan, so we can logically surmise that the first seven days of the feast symbolize the Millennium—the whole thousand-year reign of Christ upon the earth. This, of course, begs the question: what does the eighth day stand for? It (like the first day of the feast) is a designated Sabbath, telling us that it is a time to rest in Yahweh's completed provision. Moreover, eight is the number of new beginnings. The eighth day represents the eternal state—the “everlasting life” God's love was designed to give us, as we're reminded in John 3:16.

In other words, it's not over for the human race when Christ's Millennial Kingdom has run its course. For one thing, since mortals cannot endure the direct presence of Yahweh, all believers—i.e., those mortals who lived during the Millennium—will be transformed (one word for it is “translated”) into the immortal state, just like the raptured and resurrected saints before them.

Not surprisingly, the Bible has quite a bit to say about the eternal state, for it is the goal, the point, of Yahweh's entire creation process. I get the distinct impression (though we're not told plainly in scripture) that the only reason Yahweh built a physical universe at all was to provide temporary, mortal bodies for the human race—bodies in which we, having been given free will, could choose (if we wished) to reciprocate the awesome love our Creator showed us. We'd have our whole lives (however long or short) to decide what to do with God's gift of life. Some of us (I'm sure He knew) would choose poorly, opting to deny and betray the very God who made us for no other purpose than to share a life together. Others (the vast majority, I'd venture) wouldn't choose any destiny at all, preferring to imagine (if they thought about it at all) that people are just smart animals, with no spiritual component. The theory is that this mortal life, as miraculous as it is, is merely an incredible cosmic accident—actually, an unending string of them. How wrong you can be.

But some of us would indeed notice how infinitely unlikely our life is without a Designer; we'd discern that the awesome universe in which we live must have an equally awesome Creator—Someone to whom we owe our very existence. And we'd heed the only remotely plausible written communication that has ever surfaced among men that purports to be a message from the same Creator Deity who made us, the world, and the cosmos.

Being finite, mortal humans, none of us would grasp the significance, the scope, or the sheer immensity of what the Creator did for us. But like small children relating to their parents, we would use what little we *could* comprehend to form our “world view” based on the reality of their love. Yes, like infants, we are needy, helpless, demanding, and woefully unprepared for the wide world. We require round-the-clock care, and we smell funny. And like parents, Yahweh is okay with that, for He loves us unconditionally. He created us *knowing* our penchant for getting into trouble. But He (having given the whole “infant” thing a dry run) also knows that if we choose to make good use of the privilege of free will He's given us, we have the potential to grow in wisdom, and stature, and in favor with God and man. That process need not be confined to these mortal lives, either, but can—and will—continue throughout eternity.

## Judgment Day

First-century Jews, even those intimately familiar with the prophecies about their Messiah, were caught flat-footed when things turned out like they did. The scriptures clearly painted two different pictures, one of a suffering savior and the other of a reigning King. But nobody, it seems—not even Satan—realized that the Messiah’s advent would be split into two phases with two separate objectives until the risen Yahshua instructed His disciples on the finer points of prophecy. The promise of His return, however, galvanized the apostles into a Spirit-filled army who changed the face of the world.

Within weeks of the resurrection, Peter was plainly telling people what had happened and what to expect next: **“Those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has...fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”** (Acts 3:18-21) Ever since then, we have been longing for these “times of refreshing,” the “times of restoration of all things.” As the Tribulation whimpers to a merciful end, those times have finally come.

The psalmist eloquently captures the spirit of the moment. **“Oh, sing to Yahweh a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory. Yahweh has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations....”** Interesting: His “righteousness,” not just His power. Apparently, the collective conscience of mankind isn’t completely dead. Man will know intuitively that the victory of Yahshua over the Antichrist and the Dragon represents not just the conquest of the weaker by the stronger, but the triumph of good over evil. This epiphany, however, may not be equally welcome news to everyone.

**“He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel.”** It’s been two thousand years since they turned their back on Him, but Yahweh keeps His promises. **“All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout joyfully to Yahweh, all the earth; break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises. Sing to Yahweh with the harp, with the harp and the sound of a psalm, with trumpets and the sound of a horn. Shout joyfully before Yahweh, the King.”** The victory of Yahshua is not a localized event. His triumph has freed the entire world from the bondage of Satan’s control, and the Psalmist calls upon the earth to celebrate. **“Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills be**

**joyful together before Yahweh....**” Not only will the redeemed of mankind shout in celebration, the very environment will rejoice. It’s been through a lot lately, what with nuclear and bio-chemical war, hail, fire, brimstone, the death of the oceans, a three-and-a-half-year drought, and the biggest earthquake ever. The earth is more than ready for the “times of restoration.”

**“For He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, and the peoples with equity.”** (Psalm 98) There’s the punch line. Yes, it’s Judgment Day. We have trivialized and misapplied the term for centuries, but there really is such a time in God’s plan, and it’s approaching like a freight train. Those who are living under the umbrella of Yahweh’s righteousness have nothing to worry about, for He will make His judgments based upon that—*His* righteousness. And those who have been relying on their good works to make points with God on some grand cosmic scale should be gratified (at least at first) to find that He is perfectly willing to judge them on that basis. In the end, no one will be able to complain that God hasn’t been fair.

The writer of Hebrews put it bluntly: **“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.”** He then defines this willful sin: **“Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says Yahweh. And again, ‘Yahweh will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”**

(Hebrews 10:26-31) The thing is, if you want mercy you’ve got to ask for it—otherwise, all you’ll get is justice.

In a passage roughly parallel to Psalm 98, David again pictures a time when Messiah’s physical presence will radically transform the nature of life on earth. **“Sing to Yahweh, all the earth; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. For Yahweh is great and greatly to be praised; He is also to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but Yahweh made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and gladness are in His place....”**

By this point in our timeline, the survivors of the Tribulation will have figured this out. David prescribes the proper response: **“Give to Yahweh, O families of the peoples, give to Yahweh glory and strength. Give to Yahweh the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come before Him. Oh, worship Yahweh in the beauty of holiness!...”**

The earth itself, which has been through so much in recent days, will breathe a sigh of relief when Christ’s reign is established. **“Tremble before Him, all the earth.”** As we have seen, it did precisely this when Yahshua’s big toe touched the Mount

of Olives. But now, **“The world also is firmly established; it shall not be moved.”** This seems to support my hypothesis that the coming Millennium will not suffer from the same sort of tectonic exuberance that marked the years leading up to it. **“Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; and let them say among the nations, ‘Yahweh reigns....’”** If we take this sentence at face value, it seems to be saying that the very heavens and earth will be praising God. But maybe it only means that the communications revolution we’ve enjoyed in the last few decades will be developed even further and used to broadcast the glory of Yahshua—Live, from Jerusalem! Either way, it can’t be bad.

**“Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; let the field rejoice, and all that is in it. Then the trees of the woods shall rejoice before Yahweh, for He is coming to judge the earth.”** (I Chronicles 16:23-33) As in Psalm 98, all of the rejoicing on earth is capped with the news that Yahweh is coming in judgment. We usually think of judgment as being a bad thing (probably because we’re all guilty). But twice now we’ve seen it characterized as the crowning moment of the return of the Messiah in glory—the best thing that’s happened to this planet since creation. Yahweh’s coming judgment is, in fact, the reason that all of creation is seen rejoicing. After all, it would be really depressing to learn that in the end, the God who made heaven and earth didn’t care enough about its inhabitants to come and separate His enemies out from among His friends. And that’s the essence of judgment: separation—of the good from the bad, of the valuable from the worthless, or of the living from the dead.

In the end, the nature of judgment will depend on your relationship with the Judge. **“The hand of Yahweh shall be known to His servants, and His indignation to His enemies. For behold, Yahweh will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword Yahweh will judge all flesh; and the slain of Yahweh shall be many.”** (Isaiah 66:14-16) God’s servants (their works, anyway) will be judged through fire, and His enemies will experience the sword.

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Yahshua, during his first-century advent, did lots of teaching about this coming judgment. You’d think we’d have paid closer attention, since our eternal destiny depends on what he said. Much of this information was conveyed in the form of parables. For example, **“There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.”** The landowner is Yahweh. He has “leased” His earth to us. **“Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the**

vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit.” These servants are the prophets and apostles, who were sent to convey God’s instructions. **“And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son....’”** You’d think so, wouldn’t you, especially since the prophets told them He was coming. The son, of course, is Yahshua. This “sonship” metaphor is a teaching device; the lesson is that Yahshua came with all of the authority of God—thus rejection of the human “Son” was tantamount to rejection of Yahweh Himself. There is no difference between Yahweh and Yahshua as far as Their authority is concerned.

**“But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.”** This is such a stupid thing to do, there is only one possible explanation. The vinedressers (that’s us, if you’ll recall) held the Landowner in total contempt. They mistook His patience for weakness. They actually thought they could get away with this. They had no idea Whom they were dealing with. So Yahshua asked His disciples to draw the obvious conclusion: **“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?’ They said to Him, ‘He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was Yahweh’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”?** Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” (Matthew 21:33-44; cf. Luke 20:9-18)

The “stone” that the builders—the Jews—rejected is the Messiah, who has now taken His place as the centerpiece, the key building block, of the Kingdom of Heaven. The passage, though poetic, is quite clear: Yahshua is the standard by which mankind will be judged. We are either covered with His righteousness or condemned by it.

Note also that Yahshua ties the imagery of the “stone the builders (Israel) rejected” with the description of the earth’s final kingdom, foreseen by the king of Babylon and explained by Daniel. **“You [Nebuchadnezzar] watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.”** This “image” represented the sum total of gentile world power through the ages of man. **“Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth....”** The “stone” is Christ, and the “mountain” is His Millennial kingdom. The nations, meanwhile, are dust. **“The God**

of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.” (Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45)

I have always seen the obvious application of Yahshua’s parable, that the kingdom would be taken away from Israel (in the temporal sense) and put instead into the hands of the Church for safekeeping—not the ecclesiastical religious organization that calls itself the “Church,” but the called-out assembly of believers who truly “bear the fruits” of the kingdom of God. That much is history, and indeed, it’s the very thing that leads the Replacement Theology proponents to think that God is finished with Israel. But there’s more to it. Notice when the transfer of the vineyard takes place: it’s when the Owner Himself *comes back*. Note too from whom the kingdom of God would be taken when the Owner returned: from “you.” The disciples were sons of Israel, to be sure, but they also represented the Called-Out Assembly, the church.

I believe that Christians have often misread this passage. It is not a get-out-of-jail-free card; it’s a warning. The church, sadly, has historically been almost as unfaithful in the stewardship of the Kingdom of God as Israel was. But when the Messiah returns, the kingdom will be put into the hands of those—whether Jew or gentile—prepared to deliver its “fruit” to the Landowner. This fruit, as Paul explains in Galatians, is love and the things that grow out of it: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The same message is taught another way in a second parable: **“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, [the king, of course, is Yahweh; the son is Yahshua] and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, ‘See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.’” But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them....”** The intended guests, again, are Israel, and the servants are the prophets and apostles.

The King, for His part, saw very little practical difference between those who ignored His servants and those who took a more proactive stance, going so far as to murder them. **“But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.”** That happened, quite literally, in 70 A.D. **“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.’** What would have made them “worthy” was not sinless perfection, but merely a positive response to the King’s invitation to the feast.

**“Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good....”** This is a picture of the calling out of Yahshua’s assembly.

All of us, good and bad alike, are welcome as long as we’re covered by the righteousness of Christ—the “wedding garment” in this story. **“And the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”** (Matthew 22:2-14) Here again we see that just because Israel has un-invited itself, and the Church has been invited to the party in its place, our salvation is based on something other than merely wanting it. When the “King comes in to see His guests,” it won’t matter if we’re Jews or gentiles; it won’t matter if we’ve tried to be good boys and girls all our lives or if we’ve fallen into all kinds of sin along the way. It will only matter that we’re covered with Yahshua’s righteousness. We can try to fake it—sit in a pew, sing hymns, and drop money in the offering plate—but the King is only interested in whether we’ve shown enough respect to put on the garment of righteousness He’s provided for us. Everybody has been invited—there’s no reason to crash the party.

As if speaking directly to those who would be tempted to try to sneak into the kingdom through the back door, (and especially, during the Tribulation, to do it by receiving the Mark of the Beast) Yahshua said, **“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”** (Mark 8:34-38) The underlying premise here is that Yahshua *will* return in glory. It seems to me that if we really grasped that concept, we might live our lives a bit differently.

Conversely, if Yahshua was just a man who had a great spiritual impact on his times but wasn’t God in the flesh—in other words, if He wasn’t expected to physically return to rule the earth—then we could afford to be less circumspect in following His instructions. It would be sort of like driving through a little town that only has one traffic cop—and you happen to know he’s out with the flu. How much attention would you pay to the speed limit? You’d be apt to consider it more a guideline than a law, wouldn’t you?

This same counterintuitive logic—death to our egos resulting in life through the crucified Christ—is reflected in another illustration: **“He [Yahshua] told a parable**

to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them, **‘When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, “Give place to this man,” and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, “Friend, go up higher.” Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted....’**” He is not only giving us lessons for life here; He is also teaching us something about the judgment to come. Our status in the present world will have absolutely nothing to do with our relative position in the kingdom of God. Rather Yahshua will honor the one who humbles himself before Yahweh in service to his fellow man, the one who uses whatever gifts God has given him in aiding his neighbor rather than exalting himself. Riches, talent, beauty, and power are merely tools we are given so we can honor God and serve our brothers—they do not in themselves make us better people. On the contrary, from him who is given much, much will be required.

Yahshua’s lesson wasn’t quite done. **“Then He also said to him who invited Him, ‘When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.’”** (Luke 14:7-14) Yahshua is still talking to “gifted” people. They are not to use their gifts to enhance their own status among men, he says, but are to employ their gifts in service to those in need—loving their neighbors as themselves, as it were—which will in turn bless God Himself. It’s an issue of faith: if we truly believe that, as Yahshua said, there will be a **“resurrection of the just,”** a coming divine review of the things we did in this life, then we’ll have no problem **“laying up for ourselves treasure in heaven.”** (Matthew 6:20) But if we, deep down, think this whole “God thing” is a scam, we’ll consider helping the helpless a colossal waste of our time and resources—and we’ll resent it.

This is the tipping point, the paradigm fulcrum: is Yahshua God, or is He not? We must decide what and whom we will follow—and whom we will deny—to cut the black wire or the white wire on this ticking bomb. But be clear on one thing. What we choose has absolutely no effect upon the truth of the matter. The truth simply is.

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It behooves us, therefore, to examine what the Record says about Yahshua's glory, past and future. Where did we get the idea that He is the coming King? What did He claim? Where is the evidence? Why should we believe that He's the One?

To begin with, His coming was foretold by God's prophets. **"The word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of Yahweh. Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" (Luke 3:2-6; cf. Isaiah 40:3-5)** Interesting. Much of Isaiah's prophecy wouldn't be literally fulfilled until the final few days of the Tribulation, and yet here it is, being applied to Yahshua's *first-century* advent. And notice that when John preached repentance, he was "preparing the way of Yahweh," but the One who showed up was a man, Yahshua. Only time and events would tell if Isaiah and John had been right.

As Yahshua began His public ministry, He **"was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, 'You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" (Mark 1:9-11; cf. Luke 3:21-22)** An auspicious beginning: signs from heaven and the audible voice of God are as good a start as you could ask for.

About the same time, **"Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' And Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!' Nathanael said to Him, 'How do You know me?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' Nathanael answered and said to Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' And He said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'" (John 1:45-51)** Nathanael was right—*and* wrong. For a self-styled skeptic, he seems awfully trusting—even gullible—declaring Yahshua to be the Messiah on the flimsiest of evidence. Yahshua (no doubt shaking His head and smiling) gently informs him that there will be far greater evidence forthcoming. He never asks us to take a blindfolded leap of faith—only a small step into the light, a choice based on fact and unassailable logic. The evidence of His deity is abundant and undeniable, if

only we'll look for it—and look *at* it. Yahshua ends His conversation by telling Nathanael to look for signs of that very thing. He's saying, *Yes, I'm God in the flesh, and I'll prove it!* His miracles and resurrection did prove it, and His final coming will do so again.

Funny thing, though. The same guy who had introduced Nathanael to Yahshua—knowing that He was God's Anointed One—later demonstrated that He didn't really understand what that meant. (And I, for one, am willing to cut Philip some slack here. If I had been in his sandals, I probably would have comprehended far less.) Yahshua was saying, **"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."** Philip said to Him, **'Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.'** Jesus said to him, **'Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, "Show us the Father"?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me [i.e., exercise faith], or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves [in other words, look at the evidence]. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.'**" (John 14:7-14)

Speaking on behalf of 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans, I kind of wish God hadn't chosen to use the father-son metaphor to explain the relationship between Yahweh and Yahshua. But that's only because in our dysfunctional society, we've lost track of what that means. (Remember what I said about the Bible's cultural baggage sometimes getting lost in transit?) To us, a father and his son are two different people, with different lives, different goals, and different destinies, who happen to be related. But in that age (ideally) a grown son was the extension of his father's persona—his representative, his legacy, acting as his surrogate and exercising his authority. In a very real sense, they were one. This explains the propensity of privileged Romans to "adopt" grown men they trusted as their "sons." The ties of a father and son were far more significant than mere genetic serendipity. Thus when Yahshua is described as the "Son of God," it doesn't mean that He came one generation later, or that half of his DNA came from Yahweh. It means, rather, that He is the Man who stands in the place of God's Spirit in our corporate human experience, exercising all of the authority of Yahweh Himself—indeed, manifesting the only form of deity that we frail mortals could possibly hope to relate to. Do I comprehend it? Not really. I'm still only one step ahead of Philip, and that's only because I have the whole of scripture to pore over.

Anyway, the passage shows us once again that Yahshua, though fully human, equated Himself with Yahweh on some level. We tend to take this in stride, but we shouldn't. His mindset is unique in the annals of "religious leaders." Sure, kings of the earth from Nimrod to Nero sometimes declared themselves to be "gods." This is different. Nimrod and Nero wanted to be worshiped by men, so they carved out niches for themselves in the Pantheons of their day. Yahshua, on the other hand, spoke of Himself as being the human incarnation of the One True God, the Creator, and nobody else *ever* did that. No sane person, anyway. But Yahshua, who certainly looked and acted perfectly sane otherwise, did this time after time. **"The elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led Him into their council, saying, 'If You are the Christ, tell us.' But He said to them, 'If I tell you, you will by no means believe. And if I also ask you, you will by no means answer Me or let Me go. Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God.' Then they all said, 'Are You, then, the Son of God?' So He said to them, 'You rightly say that I am [clearly an affirmative statement in the original idiom; we would say, "You said it!"]'." (Luke 22:66-69)** In saying this, Yahshua was proving He was either divine or demented.

Similar examples are ubiquitous. Yahshua said, **"For this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.' Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to Him.' Jesus answered and said, 'This voice did not come because of Me [i.e., to impart information to Yahshua], but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.'" (John 12:27-32)** He was either Master or megalomaniac.

**"James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying... 'Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.' But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They said to Him, 'We are able.' So Jesus said to them, 'You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared.'" (Mark 10:35-40)** Yahshua didn't dispute the fact that He would reign in glory. That was a baseline assumption by this time, both for the brothers and their Master. But although James and John clearly thought that it would come about in their lifetimes, Yahshua didn't bother straightening out their misconception on that point, except to confirm that both of them would live in His service and die there. As it turned out, James and John were the first and last of the apostles to do so.

The same two guys, along with their buddy Peter, later got a crash course in the true nature of the Man they'd been following for three years: **"Now after six days**

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.... While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!' And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid." (Matthew 17:1-2, 5-6) Mortal man can't normally stand in the presence of Almighty God and live to tell the tale. As Yahweh said, to Moses, **"You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me and live."** (Exodus 33:20) That's why Yahweh became a Man and lived among us for a brief moment in time. How else could we possibly come to know Him, to walk with Him, to have a relationship with Him? Our feeble brains (at least mine) can't fathom how a mortal Man, Yahshua, could manifest the eternal Spirit of Yahweh, but Paul assures us that this is the case: **"Keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power."** (I Timothy 6:14-16) Bottom line—Yahshua either proved His deity on the Mount of Transfiguration or proved Himself to be the greatest con artist of all time.

Yahshua implied that the following Davidic psalm was about Himself. **"Yahweh said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.' Yahweh shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Yahweh is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries."** (Psalm 110:1-2, 5-6; cf. Mark 12:35-37) Either He was the worst sort of liar, since He was asking men to follow Him—or He *will* someday personally reign in Zion and "judge among the nations." There's no middle ground here. The "merely-a-great-moral-teacher" myth won't fly. He's saying that His reign will extend beyond Israel's borders to the whole world. But since when does the leader of one nation exercise the power of life and death over the heads of other countries? The Antichrist tried it; the result was chaos. Only when God rules in person will the term "King of kings and Lord of lords" have any real meaning. I submit to you that Yahshua is either King of kings or crazy as a bedbug.

After telling His disciples as plainly as He could that He was going to be crucified, Yahshua comforted them with talk of their heavenly destiny and the coming of the Holy Spirit of God to live within them. He said, **"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you."** (John 14:18) If He were not claiming to be God in the flesh (equating Himself with the Holy Spirit), how do you suppose He planned to follow through on that promise? He's not leaving the "great-teacher-but-less-than-God" theorists much wiggle room here.

And who talks to God like this? **“I [Yahshua] have glorified You [Yahweh] on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.... Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”** (John 17:4-5, 24) Of all the temerity! If you weren’t convinced that Yahshua was God, you’d want to slap him silly (which is exactly what the Jewish religious leaders did).

Okay, how about this angle? On the night before He was to be crucified, **“He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.’”** (Matthew 26:27-29; cf. Luke 22:15-17) Dead guys don’t ordinarily come back from the grave to share a drink with their friends—unless, of course, they’re God. But what are the odds of that? Yahshua is either Lord or lunatic.

A few days before this, Yahshua had been over on the Mount of Olives teaching a few of His disciples about the end of the beginning. He told them, **“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man [the title He invariably applied to Himself] will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”** (Matthew 24:29-31; cf. Mark 13:26-27) Yahshua is predicting that He will do things that no mere man could possibly do—unless He is also God. Either His is the name above all names, or He’s nuts.

Oh, and by the way, notice where the “elect” will be gathered from: not from earth, as the post-tribulation rapture position requires, but rather from the four winds, from heaven. The redeemed are *already* in heaven when they’re called to join Yahshua, as we saw in the previous chapter, to witness the “Battle” of Armageddon. Paul put it this way: **“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”** (Colossians 3:4) When He shows up, we’ll show up.

As much as today’s Christians are accustomed to viewing Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest who condemned Yahshua, as a cringing weasel, the prototypical bureaucratic scumbag, the fact is that he was a savvy and experienced politician as well as a respected religious leader. If you met him today, you’d probably want to make him a deacon—or elect him to Congress. He knew his Bible, did not rattle easily, nor was he prone to hysterics. But as he questioned Yahshua at His trial, Caiaphas clearly wasn’t prepared for this matter-

of-fact admission concerning His identity: **“Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, ‘I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his clothes [something specifically prohibited in Leviticus 21:10], saying, ‘He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy!’”** (Matthew 26:63-65; cf. Mark 14:61-64) Why did he tear his clothes in mourning and start screaming about blasphemy? Because Yahshua had just claimed to be God. In the idiom of the day, it was crystal clear.

We often forget that the high priest’s hysterical anger was precisely the right and proper response to such a statement—if indeed the speaker was *not* God. However, if Yahshua’s words were (as revisionist historians today illogically insist) something less than a confession of His own deity, then Caiaphas would have reacted differently, perhaps pressing for clarification. Instead, he just lost it: he knew *exactly* what Yahshua was saying. *Blasphemy!* Of course, it probably didn’t occur to him that it would not be blasphemy if the Man before him actually *was* **“the Christ, the son of God.”** Once again, Yahshua’s own words force us to conclude that He was either God Himself walking among us as a Man, or mad as a March Hare. When He told Caiaphas that he would see **“the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power,”** he was saying, *You’re judging me today, but the day is coming when I will sit upon God’s throne and judge you,* and Caiaphas knew it.

As long as we’re looking at Yahshua’s “trial,” let’s hear what He had to say to the Roman Procurator Pontius Pilate, who, unlike the Jewish high priest, couldn’t be expected to understand much of Hebrew theology or prophetic expectations. **“Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?’ Pilate answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?’ Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.’ Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’”** (John 18:33-37; cf. Mark 15:2, Matthew 27:11, Luke 23:3)

Pilate was no dummy. He was merely trying to ascertain whether or not Yahshua represented a political threat against his masters in Rome. He couldn’t very well allow wannabe “kings” to gallivant around the countryside gathering followers now, could he? The Jews had couched their accusation in terms of “royalty” because Pilate would at least have to pay attention to that. They knew if

they told him that their prisoner had claimed to be “the anointed one,” or the “son of God,” he would just laugh at them. Yahshua told him the simple truth: *Yes, I’m a king, but My kingdom is no threat to you or to Rome—it’s not even of this world.* Pontius took one look at the young rabbi, now haggard and stinking (having spent the wee hours in Caiaphas’ private dungeon) and decided that this man standing before him was no king. How wrong you can be. Yahshua had told him, “I am no *threat.*” He had freely admitted to being a king—to being *the King.*

Funny thing, though. Although Yahshua had not come to reign during His first-century advent, He did qualify (as a descendant of David) to be the King of the Jews. It was He of whom Yahweh had promised Solomon so many years before, “**As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked, and do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom, as I covenanted with David your father, saying, ‘You shall not fail to have a man as ruler in Israel.’**” (II Chronicles 7:17-18) Genetically, his mother was in the line of David through his son Nathan. Legally, Yahshua was a claimant to the throne through his lawful adoptive father Joseph, a descendant of David through Solomon—whose physical line was disqualified through Jeconiah. Yahshua met all the problematical genealogical requirements of the promised King of the Jews—the Messiah. And to our knowledge, He is the only one who ever did.

In summary then, Yahshua of Nazareth left us with only two choices when He was crucified in 33 A.D. Either He was a certifiable lunatic, a lying and deceitful megalomaniac whose envy of God caused Him to lure countless believers (like me) to their eternal doom through a futile belief in Him—or He really *was* Yahweh, who had taken upon Himself a human body in order to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins to reconcile a sinful human race to a holy God—and to Whom as a result belongs the prerogative of judgment. As far as I’m concerned, option #1 was rendered moot when He rose from the tomb on the third day. Lunatics (even brilliant ones) can’t do what Yahshua did before hundreds of witnesses in order to prove their claims. If you don’t agree with me on this, feel free to wait around and see what happens as human history grinds to a halt at the end of the Tribulation.

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**“The Lord Jesus, on the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in**

remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." (I Corinthians 11:23-26) *Till He comes.* That's the heart of our faith, isn't it? The proof of the pudding. When Yahshua comes back, He will have fulfilled thousands of prophecies and promises, some stated outright, some only implied, that link His return to His very deity.

We (some of us) sometimes get so familiar with the word patterns in scripture, the stunning truths of what's written there go right over our heads. Note, for instance, what's laid between the opening lines of "the Lord's prayer," Yahshua's model or example for our communication with Yahweh: **"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."** (Luke 11:2) Yes, we take it for granted that God's will is done in Heaven. And sure, we'd like to see some improvement in the conditions here on earth. But that's not exactly what He said we're to pray for. A kingdom requires a King. When we pray along these lines, we're praying for nothing less than Yahshua's return in glory, ruling the earth according to His own standards of holiness. What's more, we're praying this because *He told us to!* As we've observed, if you want to see your prayers answered, pray for something God wants.

Yahweh not only wants it, He has purposed from the very beginning to bring it to pass. As Jeremiah wrote, **"Behold, the days are coming,' says Yahweh, 'That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness. A King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely. Now this is His name by which He will be called: YAHWEH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."** (Jeremiah 23:5-6) If you'll recall, Jeremiah prophesied at a time when Babylon was breathing down the neck of a sinful and rebellious Judah. Israel, the northern kingdom, had already been toast for over a century. The last "righteous" king in David's lineage had come and gone. Even today only the first sentence of the prophecy has been fulfilled, so now, at least, we know that the "Branch" is Yahshua. But He has never yet literally "reigned" or "prospered" or "executed judgment and righteousness in the earth." And no reigning king has *ever* been called "Yahweh our Righteousness." For an unbelieving world, the prophecy is just as outlandish today as it was when Jeremiah wrote it (which is not to say it won't be fulfilled).

The same reign was foreseen by Daniel: **"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed."** (Daniel 7:13-14) Some very specific requirements are listed here; it's a description no one has ever literally embodied in all its details—yet. (1) This king is a man, a representative of (and for) the human race. (2) He

will arrive “with the clouds,” (and I don’t believe a grand entrance in a helicopter would count as a fulfillment). (3) Though a man, He will stand in the presence of Yahweh—something we have seen is impossible to survive unless the man is sinless. (4) He will rule over the entire earth. And (5) that reign will never end. That’s a tall order, I’d say. The Antichrist, who will have come closer than any man in history to filling these shoes, only accomplished #1 and #4 (and achieving #4 required selling his soul to Satan and murdering billions of people, which would presumably disqualify him for #3). As usual, the devil’s counterfeit is pretty easy to spot if you know what the real thing looks like.

John saw it all unfolding before him, both the counterfeit and the Real Thing. Our timeline, anchored in Revelation, has brought us to the very end of the Great Tribulation. The last “battle” has been won without a fight: the only “weapon” deployed was the “sword that proceeded out of the mouth” of the returning King—the voice of God. As if waving the checkered flag over Yahshua, the Winner of the human race, John tells us, **“Then a voice came from the throne, saying, ‘Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!’ And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!’”** (Revelation 19:5-6) The Final Coming of the Messiah is a *fait accompli* at this point. All of creation joins in a shout of celebration.

This is surely one of the most significant moments of all time. Its importance ranks right up there with Yahshua’s death, burial, and resurrection, the birth of the Church, the rapture, and the final salvation of Israel—each of which were commemorated in perpetuity with a “Feast of Yahweh” outlined in the Law of Moses. We have discussed each of the six prior feasts in turn. Four are past, fulfilled on the very days of their mandated annual celebrations. Two are yet future to us as I write these words, but past in our prophetic timeline. There is but one to go, the Feast of Tabernacles.

This is how Yahweh described it to Moses: **“Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month [Tishri] shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to Yahweh. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it...”** Thus the Feast of Tabernacles—alternately known as Sukkot, the Feast of Booths (Nehemiah 8:14-18), and the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16)—fell just five days after Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, in late September or October. Once again, we’re tempted to wipe our sweating brow and stammer, *Cutting it a little close aren’t We, Father? I mean, You’ve left only five days between the national epiphany in which Israel finally recognizes and accepts its Messiah and*

*the day He's scheduled to take over the government of the planet. And between those two days, there's the little matter of Armageddon to take care of.* I believe that Yahshua would answer by reminding us that since He no longer has to worry about compromising anybody's ability to choose (because by this time they've already made up their minds), five days is plenty of time. He could have finished up His program in five *minutes*.

**“Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of Yahweh for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before Yahweh your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to Yahweh for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am Yahweh your God.’ So Moses declared to the children of Israel the feasts of Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 23:34-36, 39-44) Sukkot is a seven-day feast, beginning with a day of Sabbath rest, and followed by another. As we saw with the Day of Atonement, the Sabbath rest is a reminder that we can't work for our salvation—it is a gift from Yahweh; it must be accepted, not earned.

But on the first day of the feast, designated a special Sabbath day, the people were to take branches, palm fronds, and boughs, and build booths in which to camp out and party throughout the week. Four distinct types of trees are specified: (1) “Beautiful” is from the Hebrew verb *hadar*, meaning “to honor, to make glorious. Not surprisingly, it is used of the return of Yahweh (in the persona of Yahshua) to the earth as He takes care of business a couple of days before the Feast of Tabernacles: **“Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength?—‘I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.’”** (Isaiah 63:1) So the first “tree” is King Yahshua, returning in glory.

(2) “Palm trees” are the Hebrew noun *tamar*, the water-loving date palms that congregate in oasis settings. **“The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree; He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of Yahweh shall flourish in the courts of our God.”** (Psalm 92:12-13) The second tree, then, is the righteous who will populate the Kingdom—we who will be “planted in the house of Yahweh.”

(3) “Leafy” trees. The adjective *abot* means dense with foliage. The related verb *abat* means “to weave together, to conspire, to wrap up, to intertwine something.” Who are these who conspire together, intertwined into one in the context of the Millennium? Israel and the ekklesia—woven together, like the warp and woof of one magnificent tapestry, created by and for the glory of Yahweh.

(4) “Willows of the brook” are the Hebrew noun *ereb*, meaning a willow or poplar tree. A virtually identical noun, however, denotes “a mixture, a mixed company, interwoven. The primary meaning is a grouping of people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It was used of the heterogeneous band associated with the nation of Israel as it departed from Egypt...” (*Baker & Carpenter*) Together, then, the four trees listed in Leviticus 23:40 signify the populace of the Millennial Kingdom of our Messiah, beginning with the glorious King, Yahshua himself, and including the righteous who will flourish in His courts: those of Israel and every other nation who have “conspired” together to love and honor Yahweh in truth and trust.

All this must have driven the rabbis nuts: building these tabernacles is “work,” isn’t it? No, not in God’s eyes. It is preparation for worship, which is in itself an act of worship, and that’s not the same thing at all. Remember Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus? Martha was busy “doing the work of God,” while her sister preferred to sit at the feet of Yahshua in humble adoration. Was Martha wrong? There is clearly a proper time for work, as Yahweh demonstrated in His “six days” of creation. But Mary was commended for having chosen to avail herself of the benefits of Yahshua’s personal presence while she had the chance. He knew, even if she did not, that He wouldn’t always be available for intimate moments like this—not in the flesh, anyway. The work would wait.

As with the other feasts of Yahweh, Sukkot is a metaphor, a picture of something significant in God’s plan. The key to the imagery is the tabernacle, the booth, the *pup tent*, if you will. Yahweh is telling us that He intends to “camp out” with us. He’s going to physically sojourn for a while in a place that’s not His primary domicile, just like these pilgrims in Jerusalem living in their little palm-frond huts for a week. This is obviously a picture of the King, Yahshua, condescending to leave the comforts of heaven once again so the government can finally rest upon His shoulders, so He can serve as “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace,” just as He promised. The seven days of the feast speak, I believe, of the complete thousand-year period (*the* “Millennium”) in which He will personally reign upon the earth—the last of the seven millennia in Yahweh’s grand plan for mankind, echoing the seven days of creation.

For what it’s worth, there could well have been another realization of the Feast of Tabernacles in the life of Yahshua, a partial fulfillment or dress rehearsal that connected the festival to His first advent as the return of the King does to His second. I’m speaking, of course, of the birth of the Christ Child, the *real* Christmas. We can be virtually certain that December 25 is *not* the correct day. That date was all-too-obviously chosen by Constantine’s Roman church to coincide with the existing pagan winter solstice festival, the Saturnalia. At its

heart, the whole point of a late-December holiday was to commemorate the “miraculous” birth of Tammuz, Semiramis’ bastard son who became the prototype for the sun god in all its forms. Scripture gives us few clues as to the time of year in which Yahshua was actually born. But when we’re told, **“There were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night,”** (Luke 2:8) it’s fairly certain that the dead of winter is being ruled out—it’s too cold in Judea to “live out in the fields” in December unless you absolutely have to, and these shepherds didn’t—they were the honored custodians of the sheep destined for the temple sacrifices. So although we aren’t specifically told, I submit to you that the Feast of Tabernacles in September or October is a perfect fit for Christ’s nativity, from the standpoint of both the scriptural record and the mind of God. It marked the day when God came to camp out among men. There is a plethora of historical evidence to demonstrate that Yahshua was born on the Feast of Tabernacles in 2 BC. Refer to my Appendix on Chronology, entitled “No One Knows...” for more details.

Moses isn’t done instructing us. **“You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates. Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh chooses, because Yahweh your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.”** (Deuteronomy 16:13-15) Here we see why the festival was sometimes called the Feast of Ingathering. Occurring as it did in the fall, it was designed to be associated with the harvest, a factor that makes it indicative of a larger truth. We have seen scores of scriptures pointing to the eventual “ingathering” of all of Israel to the Land of Promise (and we haven’t seen ’em all yet). This feast celebrates the fact that under Christ’s reign, the ingathering will at last be fully accomplished. But the Jews aren’t the only people involved: the strangers (i.e. gentiles), the widows and orphans, those without any possessions or inheritance in the Land except for Yahweh Himself (pictured here as the Levites)—in short, everybody who’s left—will celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. They’ll celebrate—*or else*.

It may seem like I’ve extrapolated there a bit. Actually, I’ve only peeked ahead at another prophetic text: **“And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, Yahweh of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, Yahweh of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which Yahweh strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of**

**Tabernacles.**” (Zechariah 14:16-19) Moses told us that the Feast would be celebrated “**forever in your generations,**” which extends throughout the entire Millennium. Now we see that attending the Feast in Jerusalem every year will be a requirement not just for Israel, but for all the nations who went to war against her and the Messiah during the Tribulation—which, unless I’m mistaken, means virtually all of them. That’s going to make for one crowded city for a week every fall. It could be, however, that “keeping the feast” will be required only in the broader sense—the recognition and worship of the King, Yahshua. Perhaps only national representatives will be required to attend the Feast, since the passage refers to “families,” and mentions “Egypt” as an example of one. At any rate, the bottom line is abundantly clear: anything less than total reverence for Yahshua will not be tolerated.

The penalty for this hypothetical lack of respect is spelled out: “**They shall have no rain.**” Egypt is singled out as an example. It isn’t specifically predicted that Egypt will rebel—only that if they do, the punishment will be the plague of drought. You’d think that after living through three and a half years of drought under the two witnesses, folks entering the Millennium would do *anything* to avoid any more of that. Besides, Isaiah, as we have seen, foresees a bright future for Egypt, one in which Yahweh says, “**Blessed is Egypt My people.**” (Isaiah 19:25) On the other hand, a Millennium is a long time. Egypt might joyfully comply, only to rebel later.

Three times a year, Levitical Law required every Israelite male to go and worship in “the place which Yahweh chooses.” (Jerusalem, the permanent location, though chosen by Yahweh in Abraham’s time, wasn’t specified as “the place” until later, since the Israelites didn’t occupy the city until the time of David.) These three events were (1) in the spring at the Feast of Passover/Unleavened Bread/Firstfruits, (2) seven weeks later at Pentecost, and (3) in autumn at the Feast of Tabernacles. As far as we’re told, this is the only feast out of the seven that becomes a statute for the gentiles as well as the Jews when the Messiah assumes the throne of Earth. As with the first coming of Emmanuel—“God with us”—this ultimate coming represents a period of time when God will personally live among men to rule over a perfect worldwide kingdom of kingdoms—comprised of Israel and the gentile nations alike—for a thousand years. Not surprisingly, the Bible has a great deal to say about this “Millennium,” though we’ll have to save much of it for later. Right now, we’re focused on job number one: judgment, purification, cleansing. God won’t move into a filthy house, and the old tenant left the place a mess. I don’t think Satan’s going to get his security deposit back.

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For those who manage to stay alive on earth until the Feast of Tabernacles, I imagine the sigh of relief will sound like the air being let out of a thousand tires. After seven long years of carnage (minus a few months of false hope at the very beginning) the world will be universally glad to have seen the last of the Antichrist—even those who bought into his lies will be relieved that he’s gone. But because the Bible will have been suppressed for a decade or more, few on earth will know what’s coming—or will know who this new Leader really is. Many will be quite unaware that the “regime change” happening in Israel is anything more than politics as usual. Their attitude, at least in the beginning, will be “Meet the new boss, same as the old boss,” just as in the Who’s old rock anthem. They’ll pray that “we won’t get fooled again,” as if their opinion had anything to do with it. It will dawn on them slowly (but surely) that this new Leader reigns not because He’s won a battle, or even a popularity contest, but because He’s Almighty God.

Yet there will be other Tribulation survivors who have some idea, however imperfect, of the nature of this new kingdom. It was for them as much as for Church-age Christians that Peter wrote, **“But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.... Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”** (I Peter 4:7, 12-13) Those who died in Christ or were taken in the rapture will already have been rejoicing for quite some time, but those living through the Tribulation will have precious little to rejoice about until “His glory is revealed,” at the Day of Atonement. Peter’s encouragement continues: **“The genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, [will] be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ...”** (I Peter 1:7) In every age, God has considered our faith a precious thing—a sincere expression of our desire to know Him and reciprocate His love. How much more so in the coming unpleasantness, when it will be tested to the breaking point?

The writer of Hebrews concurs, quoting the prophet Habakkuk. **“For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: ‘For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.’ But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”** (Hebrews 10:36-39; cf. Habakkuk 2:3-4) These words are valuable encouragement to us on this side of the rapture, but they’ll be doubly so to any believers who read them during the Tribulation.

To the new believers of the Last Days, “endurance” will mean more than merely hanging in there, keeping a low profile and avoiding the Antichrist’s goon

squads. It's not a matter of how well they can hide, but of having the courage to "do the will of God." And what, precisely, is that, in the context of the Tribulation? Yahshua addressed that very thing during the Olivet Discourse. **"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats...."** Note first that Yahshua is confirming His claim of deity here, as well as the concept of a future advent (presumably leaving Peter, James, John, and Andrew wondering about what would happen in the short term). Everyone left alive on the earth will be placed into one group or the other. Notice that the "sheep" are said to be "His," but the "goats" are not—they belong to no one at all, or worse, to Satan himself.

**"And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me....'"** What? No doctrinal stance, no theological position, no creed? Nope. During the dark times leading up to this, precise Biblical truth will be hard to come by. The scriptures will be considered by those in power to be dangerous and inflammatory writings and will be suppressed—probably (SF4) declared illegal. But the 144,000 Jewish witnesses and the angelic evangelist(s) will be delivering their simple message: *the Messiah is coming—trust Him*. Faith in those days will be basic and binary—on or off, yes or no, take it or leave it. And the evidence of that faith will be just as simple: supplying the needs of the King—His food, drink, shelter, clothing, medical aid, and encouragement.

Huh? Meeting the *King's* needs? Those showing their faith in this way will have no idea they're doing any such thing. They're merely doing what they know to be right, *because* it's right, regardless of the possible negative repercussions. Yahshua explains: **"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me....'"** The salient question, then, is who are "these My brethren?"

Hold that thought for a moment while we look at the converse situation—the "goats." **"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or**

naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:31-46)

Again, who are these surrogates for the King? They probably aren’t the Tribulation believers in general, because that group are identified as the “sheep” who took care of them. Nor are they the Tribulation martyrs, for the “brethren” are pictured as being alive but in need. I believe they are (at the very least) the 144,000 witnesses—those whose bold words made them prime targets for the Antichrist’s wrath. Yes, they were sealed—they couldn’t be killed by the powers of Satan—but that doesn’t mean they had an easy time of it. They still needed food, drink, clothing, and shelter. Some were no doubt captured, beaten, and thrown into prison, where only the care of courageous believers kept them from despair and, if it were possible, death. In the broader sense, the brethren might be Israelites in general, for as Daniel and John remind us, Israel will go through three and a half years of exile in the wilderness, a time when they’ll have no power at all. Since it is Yahshua who calls them “My brethren,” every Jew potentially fits the description.

At any rate, all of the survivors in the whole earth will be called before the reigning Messiah. He Himself promised, **“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”** (Matthew 16:27) And these Tribulation survivors? **“They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”** (I Peter 4:5; cf. II Timothy 4:1) We’ll get to the judgment of the dead later. This is the judgment of the living, who will be divided into two groups. The saved are told, **“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”** They will go **“into eternal life.”** Mind you, these are still mortal human beings, still living under the curse of Adam, just as we are today. They are not given incorruptible bodies like those being enjoyed by the raptured and resurrected saints at this point. Rather, they are the select group who will inhabit the earth as the Millennium begins. It is they who will rebuild and repopulate the planet under the guiding hand of King Yahshua.

How many will there be? We aren’t specifically told, but my guess (SF8) is that the sheep and goats together will comprise only a small percentage of the original seven billion inhabitants of earth—perhaps a billion souls in total. (As we’ve seen, half of the earth’s population will die from two well-defined causes, roughly designated World Wars III and IV. And many potential causes of widespread premature death that don’t fall into either of these categories are enumerated in the prophetic record.) I would be thrilled to see half of the survivors designated “sheep,” but knowing the heart of man, I fear the final total

will be somewhat less. My wild guess? About three hundred million souls (SF8) will enter the Millennium—of which about four or five million are Israelites (one third of their population at the beginning of the Tribulation; see Zechariah 13:8-9). This is, ironically enough, approximately the same population the earth supported when Yahshua walked the earth during the first century. (The Israelite population could be much larger, however, because of Yahweh's efforts to repatriate "Jews" who currently have no idea of their biological connection to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.)

So much for the saved. The damned, on the other hand, "**depart...into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels,**" into "**everlasting punishment.**" This doesn't sound too encouraging for the unbelievers who were lucky enough or skillful enough to ride out the storm, avoiding the battles and staying under the radar. In the end, it's what they do with the Messiah that counts—some things never change. As we saw (between the lines) in the Olivet Discourse passage above, there will be those who thought their religion would be sufficient to save them. But it's not enough. For that matter, It's not even relevant, and it might even be counterproductive. As James asked, "**What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can [such] faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warm and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**" (James 2:14-17) What James was thinking, but didn't exactly say, was that faith without evidence isn't really faith. This will certainly be true as the Tribulation groans to a close.

We're talking about the fate of those who, for whatever reason, refused to care for the Messiah's "brethren" during the Tribulation. We'll look at the whole heaven-hell scenario later. For now, suffice it to say that the "goats" don't get to stay on earth with the sheep and live in Yahshua's kingdom—even as second-class citizens. In the end, all their survival skills didn't do them any good at all. They are summarily killed and sent to a place so nasty that God never intended for human souls to inhabit it at all. But it's the only place available to them, since they've said ever so eloquently with their actions that not only don't they want to live in a universe with Yahshua, they've proactively aligned themselves with Satan. So to hell with them: it's the only place God doesn't go. Yahweh wouldn't dream of abridging their right to choose their own destinies.

As usual, none of this is exclusive to the New Testament. The Jewish scriptures have been saying pretty much the same thing all along. Consider Psalm 37: "**For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace....**" If you thought Yahshua was being overly

optimistic (or just plain sappy) in the Sermon on the Mount when He said that the meek would inherit the earth, you were wrong. Though it obviously hasn't happened yet, Yahshua, like David here, was speaking prophetically. It's future history. Survival of the fittest—usually taken to mean the strongest, most aggressive, and most self-serving—is a myth, even in the natural world. The meek—those who joyfully place themselves under the sovereignty of Yahshua—will indeed “inherit the earth.” They'll be the only ones left standing on it when the smoke clears.

David continues: **“The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth. Yahweh laughs at him, for He sees that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn the sword and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, to slay those who are of upright conduct. Their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken....”** Yahweh sees the plotting and oppression of wicked men as an affront to His own holy character. We humans are the crowning achievement of His creation—we're the whole point, unless I miss my guess. Thus to “plot against the just” and “slay those who are of upright conduct” is to spray paint ugly, hateful graffiti on God's favorite wall.

As you may have noticed, Yahweh's arithmetic doesn't deliver the same sums as fallen man's. **“A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but Yahweh upholds the righteous. Yahweh knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. But the wicked shall perish; and the enemies of Yahweh, like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away.”** (Psalm 37:10-20; cf. James 4:14) Here are the sheep and goats again, the upright and the wicked. Whatever advantage the goats thought they'd gained by turning their backs on the needs of God's people is up in smoke.

As if he hadn't yet made his point, David rambles on. **“For Yahweh loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell in it forever.... Wait on Yahweh, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree. Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more.”** (Psalm 37:28-29, 34-36) What a fascinating, terrifying day it will be when Yahshua separates the sheep from the goats. This isn't like a battle, where two sides face each other and take their chances. It's more like the metaphor Yahshua used: everybody on earth will stand before the Shepherd like livestock in His pasture, hearing either “You're one of My beloved sheep—rejoice and inherit the kingdom,” or “You're an evil goat—perish in the lake of fire I prepared for Satan.” There will be

protests and excuses, of course, but **“Yahweh loves justice,”** and He doesn't make mistakes.

This won't be a nation-by-nation thing, either; you won't be designated a sheep because you're an American, or a goat because you're French (for example). God is dealing with individuals from every nation. Speaking to the sheep, God says, **“When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it.”** They will be eyewitnesses to the fairness of Yahshua's justice, humbled and thankful to be recognized and rewarded for merely doing what they considered **“the right thing,”** and at the same time chagrined to see that the goats' behavior has led them to such a horrible end. I'm not saying that the sheep will be saved by their works, only that their works will be the only evidence of their faith allowed in this court. In many cases, as we saw above, the **“defendants”** themselves won't even know whether they're innocent or guilty, for they're unfamiliar with the law of the land—they've been operating on conscience alone. Two people will stand side by side. One will be taken, the other left—sort of like the rapture in reverse.

For their part, the goats won't have a leg to stand on. God's warning has been around for three thousand years: **“He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who tells lies shall not continue in my presence. Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land, that I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of Yahweh.”** (Psalm 101:7-8) We must not confuse Yahweh's patience with weakness, lack of resolve, or senility.

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Isaiah explained why Messiah's judgments are unassailable. **“His delight is in the fear [i.e., reverence] of Yahweh, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist.”** (Isaiah 11:3-5) That's right. No slick lawyers, no questionable testimony, no malleable jury to cajole and convince. Yahshua judges **“with righteousness.”** He can't be fooled by Johnny Cochran; His hands aren't tied by arbitrary rules of evidence or inadequate laws. And there is no higher court to which one can appeal. Yahshua simply knows the truth and acts upon it.

There shouldn't be any question at this late date, but some are no doubt still pondering: *Yes, but can He make His judgments stick?* If He can't, who can? Remember, this is the One of whom it was recorded, **“Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, ‘Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?’”** (Matthew 8:26-27) It was a rhetorical

question, of course. It was obvious to Yahshua's disciples at this point that He was God incarnate. He alone has the right, the authority, the wisdom, and the power to judge the earth.

The patriarch Job was once challenged with the awesome nature of the Almighty: **"Have you [Job] an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His? Then adorn yourself with majesty and splendor, and array yourself with glory and beauty. Disperse the rage of your wrath; Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him. Look on everyone who is proud, and bring him low; tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together. Bind their faces in hidden darkness."** (Job 40:9-13) Job, of course, could only humble himself in the face of such a description and fall on the mercy of Yahweh. The Antichrist took up the challenge, discovering that all he could really do was intimidate or kill people—a poor substitute for "arraying yourself with glory." Yahshua, on the other hand, looks at the world and says, *Yes, and I'm about to do this very thing.* Acting like God is a whole lot easier if you actually *are* God.

I believe Job would rise up in agreement with the sons of Korah and say, **"Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One, with Your glory and Your majesty. And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, and righteousness; and Your right hand shall teach You awesome things.** [The NIV renders that: **Let Your right hand display awesome deeds.**] **Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; the peoples fall under You...."** *Humility?* How did that get into the list? You don't normally find that sort of word in the same thought with "majesty," "mighty," and "awesome." But the King personified humility when he set aside His divine glory to become a man. That would go a long way toward explaining why God seems to have less patience with human pride than just about anything. Yahshua alone has the right to rule.

Moreover, His kingdom is eternal. It's not over yet. It will *never* be over. **"Your throne, God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions."** (Psalm 45:3-7) It no doubt seemed strange to the psalmist to be singing to God about the fact that *His* God has anointed Him. But when Yahweh took on the form of a man in the person of Yahshua, that's exactly what happened. This divine anointing, of course, is what made Yahshua the Messiah; it's what the word means—*anointed*. The scepter He holds, the symbol of his reign, is righteousness, the Hebrew *tsedeq*, meaning justice, rightness, fairness, being proper according to an ethical, moral standard—i.e., the will of Yahweh. Indeed, according to this passage, the *reason* Yahshua is anointed is *because* He judges in righteousness, not the other way around. It's another big nail in the coffin of the "Jesus-wasn't-quite-God" hypothesis.

Like it or not, the kings of the earth bear a greater responsibility than the common man, for Yahshua has given them the power to spread good or evil—to promote the worship of the One True God or to elevate themselves over Him in their own eyes (see Acts 12:20-25). Thus politicians who seek high office because they crave power are the most foolish of men. Presidents and potentates who pervert the truth in order to gain political advantage will be held accountable in the Day of Judgment: **“God is in [Zion’s] palaces; He is known as her refuge. For behold, the kings assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marveled; they were troubled, they hastened away. Fear took hold of them there, and pain, as of a woman in birth pangs, as when You break the ships of Tarshish with an east wind. As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of Yahweh of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it forever. Selah.”** (Psalm 48:3-8) Sadly, there is no indication that Yahshua will find much faithfulness in high places when He judges the world’s rulers. Rather, the kings are described as being amazed, troubled, full of fear, and in pain. The psalmist likens their plight to merchant ships caught in a perfect storm. There is no escape.

A dress rehearsal of these days is seen in the Exodus. Those who refused to believe the promise of Yahweh were prohibited from entering the Land, though because Moses pleaded with God to forgive them, He allowed the Israelites to live out their lives in the wilderness—rather than killing them outright for their rebellion. Only two men from that generation, Joshua and Caleb, would cross the Jordan. **“Yahweh said [to Moses]: ‘I have pardoned, according to your word; but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh—because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.’”** (Numbers 14:20-24) Joshua the son of Nun, in his leadership role, represents Yahshua. (Even the name is the same: “Yahweh Saves,” son of “the Perpetual.”) Caleb is the picture of the believing remnant—those who came out of the world, lived through the Tribulation, and trusted Yahweh to keep His promises. (In a fascinating twist, it turns out that Caleb was actually a gentile, a Kenizzite—a descendant of Esau. He was one of the “mixed multitude” who saw Yahweh’s hand of deliverance against the Egyptians, wisely opting to ally himself with the Hebrews. His clan was absorbed into the tribe of Judah, where his character brought him to a position of prominence.) Judgment fell upon everyone else in the Israelite camp. But these two were faithful, and because of what they represent, **“All the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh.”**

Moses’ protégé wasn’t the only “Joshua” in the Old Testament whom God tapped to exemplify the coming Messiah. The prophet Zechariah wrote, **“The word**

of Yahweh came to me, saying: Receive the gift from the captives...who have come from Babylon—and go the same day and enter the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah. Take the silver and gold, make an elaborate crown, and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest.” (Zechariah 6:1-11) There’s more going on here than just the history of it. The offices of priest and king were to be symbolically united in the person of Joshua—clearly a messianic type of the future Yahshua since the priests and the king were normally supposed to be from different families, separate tribes. Another significant factor: Jehozadak, the name of Joshua’s father, means “Yahweh is righteous.” And where did the raw materials for the crown (prophetic of the honor borne by the priest/king) come from? From the returning exiles—representative of the believing remnant coming out of captivity in the world, entering into the kingdom of God.

Zechariah saw the same cast of characters in this vision: the “angel of Yahweh,” probably a theophany, is heard saying, **“Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign....”** These “companions,” I believe, are the same ex-exiles who were to provide the gold and silver for the priest/king’s crown. They are indeed “a wondrous sign,” for by their very presence they prove the mercy and faithfulness of Yahweh. Let’s face it: the odds against their survival and repatriation, whether historically or prophetically, were anorexically slim. **“For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH [i.e., the Branch of David, Yahshua]. For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.”** (Zechariah 3:8-9) The “stone” is reminiscent of the stone in Daniel’s vision (2:34, 44-45) identified as **“a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.”** The “seven eyes” speak of Messiah’s perfect knowledge—He sees everything—and the inscription is a promise of swift judgment. As we saw a few chapters back, the timeline revealed in Daniel 12:12 suggests that Yahshua will take the first 45 days of the Millennium to cleanse the earth, to separate the sheep from the goats. Here we see that the job will be done in Israel in a single day. My guess is that it will be the *first* day.

Why cleanse Israel first? Because they are the only nation Yahweh is concerned with *as a nation*, the only nation to whom He has made promises upon which His very reputation depends. Under their Messiah, Israel will be the world’s only superpower during the Millennium. A psalm by the sons of Korah celebrates the times: **“Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph! For Yahweh Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth. He will subdue the peoples under us, and the nations under our feet. He will choose our inheritance for us, the excellence of Jacob whom He loves. Selah....”** Considering the fact that the Jews have historically been far more concerned with their immediate survival than with pipedreams of national preeminence, this is an exceedingly odd thing to say—or it would be, had not Yahweh ordained it. It is *so* strange, in fact,

that the Israelites would never have thought to choose or seek this destiny for themselves. Therefore, Yahweh must choose it for them. *Selah*, by the way, is a musical notation: it means “pause,” stop and reflect upon what’s just been sung.

**“God has gone up with a shout, Yahweh with the sound of a trumpet....”** This reference seems to point to either the ascension of Christ, to the rapture, or to the final victory over Satan’s armies. Either way, it once again identifies Yahshua as Yahweh. **“Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with understanding....”** Technically, “praise” isn’t telling Yahweh how good He is or bowing down before Him. The Hebrew word for praise, *halal*, means to shine, flash, or radiate light. All of our subsequent thankfulness, admiration, and extolling of His virtues emanate from the light that Yahweh has placed within us, without which we *can’t* “praise” Him. God isn’t looking for mindless Islamic-style submission; rather He deeply desires for us to recognize and radiate the palpable truth of His glory and His love. He wants us to *understand*. **“God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne. The princes of the people have gathered together, the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted.”** (Psalm 47) As much as we believers like the tone of Psalms like this, the fact is that God does *not* “reign over the nations” today in any literal way. But that is all about to change.

Another short psalm picks up the oft-repeated theme. **“Praise Yahweh! Sing to Yahweh a new song, and His praise in the assembly of saints. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise His name with the dance; let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp....”** We sometimes read these psalms and yawn, *Yeah, yeah, God’s really good, blah, blah, blah*. Admittedly, there’s an awful lot of this kind of thing, and it all starts to sound the same after reading fifty or sixty of them. But please note that when the psalmist starts talking about “subduing the peoples” under the feet of the saints, or “executing vengeance on the nations,” he’s revealing prophecy: future things we must take on faith if at all, for Yahweh has not literally done any of this yet, and this is not figurative language. God must either pay off on His promises or be called a liar. When we praise Him for what He has done, we’re demonstrating our gratitude. When we praise Him for what He’s *going* to do, we’re demonstrating our faith.

**“For Yahweh takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud on their beds [literally: resting place]. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the written judgment—this honor have all His saints. Praise Yahweh.”** (Psalm 149) What’s that? The judgments of God will be carried out by His *saints*? Everything we’ve seen up to

this point indicates that Yahshua will judge the nations all by Himself, without our help. Now we see the saints “executing His vengeance.” Who are these people, anyway? The word in Hebrew is *chased*. It means: the godly, the ones faithful to Yahweh and set apart for His purposes. In other words, this is not a class of super believers with whom God is especially impressed (as the Roman Catholic usage of the term would imply) but rather includes *all* who have a trusting relationship with Yahweh—all of the “saved people,” all who have God’s Spirit dwelling within them. And the Psalmist specifically speaks of a subset of the saints—those within Israel. These are the ones who will “execute God’s vengeance on the nations” and “bind their kings with chains.” Is God confused? Does this mean the “saints” are supposed to be bombing abortion clinics, knocking off drug dealers, and assassinating politicians who don’t toe God’s line? No. What we have here is a case of “different time, different place, different job.” But before I explain, let’s visit one more psalm.

**“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to Yahweh, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is Yahweh’s, and He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth shall eat and worship; all those who go down to the dust shall bow before Him, even he who cannot keep himself alive. A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of Yahweh to the next generation. They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this.”** (Psalm 22:27-31)

That last sentence is the key. You see, the generation that enters the Millennium won’t be its last generation—far from it. Although every person who enters the Thousand-Year Kingdom will be a believer, redeemed and sanctified by the blood of Yahshua, they’ll still be mortal human beings. They will marry and bear children—lots of them, unless I miss my guess. Just like us in the present world, these children will still possess the sinful nature they inherited from Adam; they will require salvation, as their parents did. And just like us, some will gladly receive God’s gift of life, and some will rebel against it.

To put this in perspective, allow me to hypothesize a bit about future populations. My guess was that about 300 million souls—the “sheep”—will enter the Millennium. I would also guess that by the end of this thousand-year period of peace, prosperity, and perfect environment (something I’ll discuss more fully in the coming chapters) the earth’s population could easily climb back to the seven billion mark. I have no scriptural evidence for this, but it’s a reasonable number considering the conditions, not to mention being a poetic echo of God’s grand plan. Anyway, that would leave something over six and a half billion souls who will be born during the Millennium—and every one of them will be faced with the same choice we all have to make: love Yahweh or reject Him.

Those who choose to rebel will be summarily judged, but this time Yahshua will not personally do the job in every case, as He did during the Tribulation and

its aftermath. Rather, He will delegate the job to His now-immortal saints. We have already seen how the raptured and resurrected Church-age saints will “reign with Christ” (a concept that still boggles my mind). Yahshua specifically told His disciples that they would judge their nation, Israel: **“You are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”** (Luke 22:28-30) And Paul, in chastising the litigious Corinthians, revealed that the saints would judge far more than that: **“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?”** (I Corinthians 6:1-3)

Moreover, we’ve seen how the Old Testament saints are closely associated with the Church-age believers in positions of responsibility, demonstrated by the twenty-four heavenly thrones of Revelation 4:4. Now let us return to Revelation for more information. **“I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.... This is the first resurrection.”** (Revelation 20:4-5) Two groups are in view here. The thrones are apparently the same symbol that John saw back in chapter 4—occupied by the Church-age saints and those (mostly in Israel) who preceded them. It is said that **“judgment was committed to them.”** But then we see a second group, described as the Tribulation martyrs. Actually, I believe (SF3) this group includes anyone who came to follow Yahshua after the rapture but died before the end of the Tribulation—of whom the martyrs are the representative group. *No one* who comes to faith after the rapture will have an easy time of it, and multitudes of them will die in the general mayhem of the times—without being specifically “martyred” (or “beheaded,” as the text puts it) because of their testimony.

The “first resurrection” includes saints who were redeemed and subsequently lost their lives *after* the rapture. But then we see them reigning with Yahshua on the earth during His thousand-year Kingdom. That implies that there must be a second harvest, or rapture-like event, just for them at the end of the Tribulation, for they can’t function as described if they’re disembodied souls. They must have received their immortal, resurrection bodies, just like the saints raptured prior to the Tribulation. This could be either an event or an ongoing process, but John is said to have seen their *souls* (Greek: *psyche*—the inner self, heart, mind, life, breath, soul, or person as a living being), so I can’t be dogmatic. *Psyche* is used of the natural, physical life, the whole man, the place of feeling, or true life in

contrast to mere physical existence. The word is so broad, it's hard to say with certainty the state of the martyred "souls" he saw.

There will surely be multiplied millions of them, for we read, **"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'... These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."** (Revelation 7:9-10, 14-17) This is describing the same group, the redeemed Tribulation martyrs and victims. First, they are said to "reign with Christ for a thousand years," and then we read that they'll "serve Him day and night in His temple." A contradiction? Not really. Reigning and service are supposed to be the same thing, no matter what our politicians think. More to the point, *this* scene takes place in heaven—before Yahshua's glorious return. The Tribulation dead being described will be among those accompanying the King on white horses as He returns to reign upon the earth (see Revelation 19:14). The Revelation 20 passage takes place on earth, afterward.

What's the bottom line? Yahshua will be the absolute, unquestioned authority on the earth for a thousand years, and those who have trusted in Him for their salvation (whether looking forward, to or back upon, His earthly life) will help administer His Kingdom. More specifically, the immortals who accompanied Yahshua back to earth from heaven on the Day of Atonement will "reign with Him," and "judge the world." A subset of this group, the Tribulation Martyrs (now immortals as well) will "serve Yahshua day and night in His temple." And apparently, the mortals of the redeemed nation of Israel will physically carry out the judgments of King Yahshua and His immortal saints in the Millennial earth, as we saw in Psalm 149.

**"[Yahshua] humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."** (Philippians 2:8-11) The Greek word for "bow" is *kampto*, which the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines as: "The gesture of full inner submission in worship to the one before whom we bow the knee. Thus in Revelation 14:11 [quoted above]

bowing the knee is linked with confession within the context of a judgment scene, and in Philippians 2:10 it again accompanies confession with reference to the worship of the exalted *Kyrios* ["Lord"] Jesus by the cosmos—that is, the whole world. Note that it's not merely a physical act, but rather a heart attitude, since both angels and demons are included in the roster of those who will "bow," and they are *spiritual* beings—they're not exactly equipped with knees.

This picture of "bowing in submission" before the risen Messiah is seen in sharp contrast to the normal attitude of familial relationship Yahweh wants with us: walking upright with Him, being conversant, respectful, open and honest—a Father and child relationship. He *hates* the obsequious obeisance of formal and mindless religious ritual. Therefore, it is a safe assumption that when "**at the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow... and every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,**" God is primarily describing those who have chosen *not* to revere Him, those who don't have a familial bond with Him. In the end, it won't matter whether you *want* to worship Yahshua or not—you *will*.

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If you're keeping score, you will have noticed that some segments of mankind have been "judged" at this point in time, and some have not. In the negative sense, we have been concentrating on those who were still alive but unsaved at the end of the Tribulation—the "goats." That leaves the great bulk of unredeemed humanity dead and gone, but not forgotten. Yahshua will deal with them later: "**The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.**" (Revelation 20:5) We'll discuss the judgment of these souls when our timeline catches up with us.

And what about the saved? They (we) are commonly called the "redeemed" for a very good reason. Our judgment was borne by Yahshua as He died to pay the penalty for our sins. The gift of our reconciliation with God was paid for with His blood—all we have to do is accept it. Therefore, we aren't facing a future judgment day.

Or are we? What are we to do with passages like this? "**Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: 'As I live, says Yahweh, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.'** So then each of us shall give account of himself to God." (Romans 14:10-12; cf. Isaiah 45:23) Paul was writing to Christians. Is he saying that we'll face judgment after all? Not exactly. His explanation to the Corinthians helps clear things up: "**We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according**

**to what he has done, whether good or bad.**" (II Corinthians 5:10) He's talking about the assessment of our works, the "things done in the body." Notice that the good and bad deeds alike will be examined. Our souls are not in jeopardy, but let's face it—some of the things we did were worthless, counter-productive, totally unworthy of the One who died to save us. Should such useless rubbish follow us into heaven? I think not.

On our own the best we can bring to God is garbage, for we ourselves are fallen, sinful creatures. **"We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags."** (Isaiah 64:6) As bad as that sounds, it's an overly gentle translation: it literally means "all our honest, just, meritorious, or righteous deeds (*tsadaqah*) are witnesses (*'edah*) of our treachery, faithlessness, and deceit (*begeḏ*)." Ouch. On the other hand, Yahshua said, **"Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."** (Mark 9:41) This seeming dichotomy is an illusion. Good works done with pure motives are an acceptable sacrifice of praise—and are even worthy of reward. But good works done solely to earn brownie points with God (or worse, to be seen by men so they'll think we're "good") are of no value whatsoever. As John put it, **"Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment."** (I John 4:17)

So Paul speaks of a judgment seat of Christ—a *bema*, in Greek, the same word that would have been used for judging Olympic athletic contests. In that context, it speaks not of the worth of the athlete himself, but rather of the race he's run. It's a place for rewards. "Bad" races aren't punishable offences. They're simply ignored; they're irrelevant. "Good" races, however, are rewarded with crowns of victory—recognition of a job well done. And so it is with the judgment seat of Christ. The apostle explains: **"Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown."** (I Corinthians 9:25) The laurel wreath (or gold medal) an athlete works so hard to earn won't endure, but our rewards for having run a good "human" race will last forever.

Paul also uses another metaphor: a house on fire. **"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."** (I Corinthians 3:11-15) The foundation will remain no matter what happens. And the occupant will not die in the blaze. But the house itself—the works he's done—will stand or fall depending on what materials he's used in its construction. Its value will be determined by what's left after the fire.

Even if there's nothing left but the foundation, no punishment will devolve upon the occupant. But who wouldn't prefer to see his house survive the fire?

The "fire," of course, is Yahweh's holy standard, as exemplified in the perfect life of Yahshua. It's not just what He did or didn't do, either, but *why*. In the end, everything Yahshua did was done out of love for us. All of this makes it a fool's errand for us to attempt to force people to behave themselves—to set standards of moral conduct for others. It brings them no closer to heaven, and it distracts us from the job God gave us to do—loving one another. That's why Paul said, **"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God."** (I Corinthians 4:5) Only God is qualified to judge the value of our works. Solomon, who had gold, silver, and precious stones in abundance—dwarfed only by his pile of wood, hay, and stubble—wrote, **"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear (revere) God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil."** (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14) That's the kicker, isn't it? It's not just the things we do in the light of day. Our works include "every secret thing," whatever we do when nobody is around to watch us (except God).

That's not to say that *only* what we do in secret will be rewarded. Paul admonished those blessed with the world's goods to use them in God's service, not to be seen by the world as a philanthropist (or worse, to get a break on your taxes), but simply to meet needs. Though a rich man's giving wouldn't save him, it would tend to demonstrate that he didn't worship his wealth: **"Let [the rich] do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."** (I Timothy 6:18-19)

As a matter of fact, Yahshua told a parable teaching us that we won't be judged on our gifts (wealth, intelligence, ability, good looks) because, after all, they're *gifts*—we did nothing to earn them. What He holds us accountable for is the diligent use of those gifts. **"The kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey...."** Note that the Master knew his own servants' abilities. They weren't all equally gifted. Nor was He expecting miracles from them, only faithful service. **"Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord**

said to him, **'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord....'**" The second servant performed just as well in proportion to his resources, and he received the same commendation.

**"Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'**" (Matthew 25:14-21, 24-30) This "outer darkness," contrary to popular thinking, is not hell. The "wicked and lazy servant" was not fired, sold to another master, or executed. He remained in his Master's employ. Still, his experience was not a pleasant one. What happened to him? "Darkness" (Greek: *skotos*) is derived from a word meaning obscurity. The lazy servant had blown his opportunity to serve his Master in a position of responsibility. So he would no longer get to sit behind a big desk and take his boss's clients out to lunch. Now he would have to work on the company pig farm in Crete. Or something like that. The "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is indicative of his remorse. The lessons for us are obvious: we would be wise to use our gifts in Yahshua's service, and foolish not to.

A similar parable is told in Luke 19:11-27. I won't recount it here in full, but I'd like to point out some revealing points of divergence. Luke begins by explaining, **"Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately."** Yahshua knew that it would not; He was preparing them for what would turn out to be a two thousand year gap. So he added a new wrinkle in this telling of the story. The part of the Master in this retelling was a nobleman who **"went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.... But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'"** He wrapped up the parable by dealing with these citizens: **'Bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me.'**" (Luke 19:11-12, 14, 27) This version of the parable differentiates the rebellious "citizens" from the "servants," even the wicked, lazy one. It's one thing to live in South Heaven, away from the glorious center of the action—you know, where the streets are only *fourteen-carat* gold. It's something else entirely to be consigned to hell.

The concept of receiving rewards in the afterlife (and the possibility of losing them) was taught over and over again by Yahshua to His disciples, and they passed the lessons on to us, as in this snippet from Matthew: **“The Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”** (Matthew 16:27) John later admonished, **“Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.”** (II John v8) Note that heavenly rewards are a distinct possibility, and that they’re predicated upon what God’s children did with the time and resources they had—their works. But nowhere is it stated (or even suggested) that such works might establish one’s status as a “child of God.”

Peter understood this as well, writing, **“When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away,”** and **“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”** (I Peter 5:4, 6) Now *there’s* a concept to boggle the mind: God exalting man. It only happens to men who don’t exalt themselves. But the very best reward, to my mind, was mentioned in the introduction to his second letter, when he spoke of **“the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord...by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”** (II Peter 1:4) Yeah, that’s what I want—to be a partaker of Yahshua’s very nature, to be released from this mortal, sin-corrupted body to live with Him and in Him—forever.

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Although we aren’t told, we may logically deduce that the judgment seat of Christ will take place during the Tribulation—in heaven—before the Messiah returns to earth on the Day of Atonement. Those whose works were assessed at the judgment seat are apparently the same saints who accompany Yahshua when He returns (see Revelation 19:14). And they’re the same souls who will reign with Yahshua on earth during the Millennium, for their positions of responsibility will correlate to the value of their works. Those who were faithful will be put in charge of great things; those who were “wicked and lazy” will get to supervise the proverbial pig farm in Crete.

After the judgment seat of Christ, one more event will take place in heaven before the Lord’s triumphal return, and it’s a biggie. **“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the**

fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, 'Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' And he said to me, 'These are the true sayings of God.' And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. **Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.**'" (Revelation 19:6-10)

This is the consummation of the courtship that has been going on between Yahshua and His bride for the last two thousand years. As was customary in first-century Israel, the marriage supper is held at the groom's house—in this case, that would be heaven. We've seen these bright white linen garments before—actually the bride is radiating God's light, which if you'll recall is the very definition of "praising Yahweh," which is, not coincidentally, what "Alleluia" means. The garments of light are described here as "the righteous acts of the saints." We need to remember that our good works, by themselves, are nothing—it is only by virtue of Yahshua's imputed holiness that they gain any value in God's eyes.

And who, precisely, is the bride of Christ (as if you didn't know)? It is the Church, the *Ekklesia*—that assembly of believers called out from the world to worship Yahshua as the Messiah. Paul explains: "**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.**" (Ephesians 5:25-27) Throughout this book, I've demonstrated time after time that the Church has not replaced Israel in the affections of Yahweh (as many misguided commentators insist). Rather, it enjoys its own special place in His heart, alongside its beloved but errant sister. Both Joshua and Caleb entered and prospered in the Promised Land.

If you're willing to take a few verses out of context, you might arrive at the conclusion that Israel was only a metaphor for "believers," and that now that the Church had been established, God was through with the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We read things like "**They are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham,**" (Romans 9:7-8) and deduce that perhaps God is confused as to who He made His promises to. But as we have seen, there is a vast body of scripture that clarifies the matter. And even here in Romans, the context reinforces the fact that Yahweh has plans for both Israel and the *Ekklesia*, and they aren't the same plans.

Back in the first chapter of this book, I mentioned that there were four books in the Old Testament that didn't contain any yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy, one of them being the Song of Solomon. But going back and re-reading this little book, I think I lied to you about that. The whole poem, it seems, is a picture of the intense courtship between Yahshua and His bride. The story revolves around three main characters, the Beloved (a picture of Yahshua), the daughters of Jerusalem

(obviously the nation of Israel), and the Shulamite (a metaphor for the Church). I'm not going to quote and analyze the whole thing, for as I said, it doesn't contain much in the way of specific "prophecies." I would, however, recommend that you go back and read it for yourself, bearing in mind the prophetic picture it paints of the marriage of the Lamb.

Several truths that really aren't discussed anywhere else in scripture are made clear here. First is the three-way relationship between the Messiah, the Church, and Israel. The daughters of Jerusalem are seen supporting and encouraging the love match: **"We will be glad and rejoice in you."** (Song of Solomon 1:4) Today Jews tend to resent or dismiss the identification of *our* Yahshua with *their* Messiah, but the underlying jealousy and misunderstanding will be forgotten during the Millennium. Second (and this should come as no surprise, though it might), the Church is madly in love with the Messiah, an emotional, physical, mental, *and* hormonal sort of thing. We can't wait until the moment when we can hold Him close forever. Waiting for His return is agony; we crave His touch, His voice, the warmth of His presence. We feel like it's torture being separated from Him, saying breathlessly with the Shulamite, **"I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved!"** (Song of Solomon 5:2) Third (and this *may* come as a surprise, because we're not used to thinking of Him in this light), Yahshua feels exactly the same way about us! He sees us just as any young man in love would see the woman who is in love with him—with passion, longing, and desire. He says, **"My dove, my perfect one, is the only one."** (Song of Solomon 6:9) He's in love—He thinks we're perfect. Love is blind, thank God.

This all puts the marriage supper of the Lamb in a whole new light. I can still remember the excitement, the passion, the *hunger*, of my wedding night. (Hey, it was only forty-five years ago—I may be old but I'm not dead.) Yahshua feels precisely the same way about His bride, the Church. He wants to hold us, to be with us, to look deep into our eyes and tell us we're beautiful. He wants us to know that He loves us—always has, always will.

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to go and take a cold shower.

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The judgment seat of Christ and the marriage of the Lamb apparently both happen in Heaven sometime during the Tribulation, before Christ returns to the earth to assume His rightful place on the throne of humanity. At the end of my chapter 19 if you'll recall, I offered a hypothetical timeline for the significant events that are predicted to take place during the first half of the Tribulation.

Here's the second half. Again, I'll put the Biblical certainties in italics and my educated guesses in plain text.

*Day 1,260: The mid-point of the Tribulation. The two witnesses continue chastising the Antichrist and calling down plagues and drought upon the earth; the believing Jews have fled into the wilderness.*

*Day 1,275: The Antichrist sends a large ground force to retrieve the escaping Jews. The army is destroyed, swallowed by the desert.*

*Day 1,290: The Antichrist declares a one-world monetary system, forgives all debts, public and private, consolidates and reorganizes all banks and finances under his banner. His popularity peaks.*

*Day 1,350: Demonic locusts emerge from the abyss and begin tormenting those who are not sealed by God.*

*Day 1,500: The demonic locusts cease their five-month plague.*

*Day 1,550: The judgment seat of Christ begins in heaven.*

*Day 1,621 (SF5): A 200,000,000-man army begins its conquest of the Far East.*

*Day 1,900: The marriage supper of the Lamb begins in heaven.*

*Day 2,350: The Antichrist summons the world's armies to fight against the Jews in Israel. The build-up for Armageddon begins.*

*Day 2,480: The Euphrates River goes dry. The Chinese army begins its final push toward Israel. They rendezvous with the rest of Antichrist's forces at Armageddon.*

*Day 2,490: The Jews begin their return to Jerusalem, leaving their hiding places in the wilderness. They meet no resistance. The Antichrist's 42-month reign of terror begins to crumble.*

*Day 2,512: The two witnesses are slain in Jerusalem. The world celebrates.*

*Day 2,516: The Day of Atonement. The two witnesses are resurrected. Yahshua returns to the earth. Israel recognizes its Messiah and mourns. A great earthquake is triggered as Yahshua's return splits the Mount of Olives.*

*Day 2,517: Jews flee from Jerusalem through the newly created valley to Azal.*

*Day 2,519: The Battle of Armageddon commences—and concludes.*

*Day 2,520: The Antichrist and false prophet are sent to hell. The Tribulation ends.*

*Day 2,521: The Feast of Tabernacles Begins—the first day of the Millennium.*

*Day 2,527: The last day of the Feast of Tabernacles.*

*Day 2,528: The separation of the “sheep” from the “goats” (the judgment of the Tribulation survivors) begins.*

*Day 2,565: The sheep-and-goats judgment is completed (1,335 days after the Abomination of Desolation).*

Sandwiched into the Revelation narrative, we finally find the words we’ve been longing to hear: **“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more....”** Satan has been a thorn in the side of mankind since Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden. But once we acquired our sinful nature through Adam, the devil hasn’t had to work all that hard to keep us separated from the God Who made us. A suggestion here, a temptation there, and we fall out of fellowship with Yahweh like a ton of bricks. Of course, we usually blame our shortcomings on Satan—*the devil made me do it!* So what will happen when Lucifer and his minions are bound and gagged, unable to influence things directly anymore? We (that is, the mortals of the Millennium) will find that we’re *still* prone to sin. It’s in our nature: we sin because we’re sinners. Fortunately, Yahshua doesn’t change. He will continue to forgive because He’s a forgiving God. All we have to do is ask.

I wish that last scripture had ended where I cut it off. But alas, there’s more to it. Satan has been bound **“so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.”** (Revelation 20:1-3) *Must* be? Why? Because just like us, people born during the Millennium will choose either to follow Yahshua or rebel against Him. But now that the King has returned, there’s a rub. During this time, crimes will be dealt with swiftly and surely. No one will be able to “get away with murder” like they routinely do now. So naturally, pretty much everyone will be God-fearing, law-abiding citizens, or so it would appear. Those few who openly rebel will find themselves gone. What, then, is the King to do with those who harbor rebellious attitudes in their hearts but don’t actually act them out? He can’t let them seethe forever in suppressed hatred, sullenly nurturing their secret pent-up rage against Him. But neither can He in all fairness punish them for something they haven’t done yet. So (as usual) He’s come up with the perfect—albeit painful—solution. Once again He will make man’s choices crystal clear. One last drama will unfold at the very end of the Millennium. It’s not over till it’s over.

## Chapter 26

# The Thousand Year Right

And so it begins—the prolonged period of peace and enlightenment that people the world over have been dreaming about for centuries. It seems to be universally recognized that the best this world ever gets is still not the way it's supposed to be—there's got to be something better. This is it.

That's not to say everyone pictures their ideal world as the Bible describes the Millennium. The Muslims dream of a day when *dar al-Islam* spreads over the entire earth, creating what they alternately call *dar al-salam*, the house of peace. (Don't get me started again—there's nothing peaceful about Islam.) A century ago, hopeful but misinformed Christians looked forward to a day when the banner of *their* religion would be marched triumphantly across the face of the entire globe—putting them in charge of the morals and customs of mankind (which is, if you think about it, a position not all that far removed from the Muslims'). Secular humanists, meanwhile, longed for “utopia,” a concept I would define as a wish that our sinful human behaviors could somehow cease precipitating their natural disastrous consequences.

Jewish scholars came closer to the truth, extrapolating from scripture a 7,000-year divine plan: 2,000 years of chaos, 2,000 years under the Torah, 2,000 under the Messiah, and a final one-thousand-year period of peace and renewal. 'Course, since we're coming up on the *end* of that third 2,000-year period, they're scrambling for alternate explanations. The logical solution, of course, is that Yahshua of Nazareth was indeed the promised Messiah, making the ancient rabbis' observations 100% accurate. But the Jews (having rejected Him and being unwilling to reconsider their position) choke on that idea.

Jewish apologist Tracey R. Rich, speaking of the Jews' Messianic expectations, explains: “Another Jew born about a century later came far closer to fulfilling the messianic ideal than Jesus did. His name was Shimeon ben Kosiba, known as Bar Kochba (son of a star), and he was a charismatic, brilliant, but brutal warlord. Rabbi Akiba, one of the greatest scholars in Jewish history, believed that Bar Kochba was the moshiach [messiah]. Bar Kochba fought a war against the Roman Empire, catching the Tenth Legion by surprise and retaking Jerusalem. He resumed sacrifices at the site of the Temple and made plans to rebuild the Temple. He established a provisional government and began to issue coins in its name. This is what the Jewish people were looking for in a moshiach; Jesus clearly does not fit into this mold. Ultimately, however, the Roman Empire crushed his revolt and killed Bar Kochba. After his death, all acknowledged that he was not the moshiach.”

What a sad commentary, even aside from the fact that Rich is blissfully unaware of the stunning accuracy of the prophetic fulfillments of Yahshua's life, if only you're willing to countenance multiple adverts. First, someone's conception of what their Messiah should be like has absolutely nothing to do with what God actually ordained. And second, Yahshua didn't fit the Jews' "messianic ideal" because they refused to consider *all* of their scriptures; they only allowed the passages they liked, the ones that looked like bad news for their oppressive Roman overlords. Bar Kochba, having proved by his arrogance and brutality that he was not the Messiah, brought upon his nation precisely the converse of the glorious destiny Yahweh has planned for Israel. In response to his revolt—fueled by the error of Akiba—Emperor Hadrian, in 135, turned Israel into what Ezekiel had envisioned as a “valley of dry bones,” driving out every Jew from the Land and sowing it with salt to render it worthless and barren (cf. Deuteronomy 29:23). And yet, incredibly, many Jews still see Bar Kochba as their Messianic ideal. (Required reading: *Rabbi Akiba's Messiah*, by Daniel Gruber, 1999, Elijah Publishing.)

One detail of Bar Kochba's rebellion, however, looms large in the plan of God from a prophetic standpoint. You see, his revolt, beginning in 133 A.D., coincided (according to some sources) with the last recorded celebration of Jubilee. (After Hadrian was through with them, there wasn't enough Israel left to celebrate anything—the Jews had been scattered to the four winds.) Jubilee was a special year-long event that according to the Torah was supposed to take place every fifty years in the life of Israel—twice per century. Funny thing, though. Once the ground rules are laid down in the Instructions of Moses, we never hear of it being discussed again in scripture (though it is mentioned a couple of times in passing). Yet since it seems like such a big deal in Leviticus, it begs the question: could there be prophetic implications to this?

Here's what Yahweh had to say about Jubilee in the Torah. **“And you shall count seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years. Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family. That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you.”** (Leviticus 25:8-11) He goes on to describe in detail what's supposed to take place during Jubilee. Here is a simplified rundown: (1) they weren't to sow or reap that year, but rather live off what had been provided by Yahweh already; (2) land that had been “sold” would revert to its original owner; and (3) indentured slaves were to be released from their servitude. Thus Jubilee basically meant a fresh start, a second chance—

based solely on the provision of Yahweh. It's therefore obvious (to me, anyway) that it is a picture, a dress rehearsal for the Millennium.

Since Jubilee was supposed to be celebrated every fifty years, it could be expected to occur only once during the life of any given Israelite adult. Many commentators presume that the cycle of sabbatical years was not interrupted by Jubilee (that is, the year of Jubilee was coterminous with the first year of the following sabbatical cycle), but the text doesn't support that view. Rather it implies that the sabbatical cycle starts over again *after* Jubilee, in precisely the same way an intercalary month is added occasionally to a 354-day lunar year to realign it with the sun's cycle. (And even if historians could reach consensus on how the Jews of antiquity timed the cycles—which they can't—it would be a pointless exercise. The only thing that counts is what Yahweh actually ordained, and what He intended for us to learn. It is my observation—feel free to disagree if you like—that each of these symbolic “Laws” operates more or less independently, each one teaching us its own unique truth.)

The cycle of Jubilee, then, was supposed to occur precisely twice per century, beginning on the Day of Atonement (cf. Leviticus 25:9). This makes the math simplicity itself. The last recorded Jubilee apparently began during Bar Kochba's revolt, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tishri, 133—Saturday (the Sabbath), September 26. If so, then the year of Yahshua's death and resurrection (in 33) was a Jubilee year as well. (Surprise, surprise.) And the next one (from our perspective) will fall on the Day of Atonement in 2033—the very day, if I'm not mistaken, that Yahshua the King is expected to plant His big toe on the Mount of Olives.

Thus precisely forty Jubilees—two thousand years—would separate Yahshua's first-century advent from His final return in glory. Forty is an oft-recurring number in scripture, invariably associated with testing, trial, and preparation, a perfect description of the posture of the nation of Israel for the last two millennia. If we do the math, however, we discover that this is not the only 40-Jubilee cycle delineated in scripture. The same amount of time elapsed between the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden and Abraham's almost-sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah, prefiguring the actual death, burial, and resurrection of Yahshua, the Lamb of God, precisely forty Jubilees later. Recognition of this pattern, of course, is how the second-temple-era rabbis were able to prognosticate their theory that I mentioned a moment ago: 2,000 years of chaos, 2,000 of Law, 2,000 of Messiah, and a final glorious Millennium—7,000 years total to accomplish Yahweh's plan of redemption.

Call it all a big coincidence if you want. I don't believe in 'em. I think God's trying to tell us something here. The ultimate fresh start will be given to the human race—and especially to Israel—the moment King Yahshua returns to earth on the Day of Atonement. It's a golden opportunity to begin again with a clean

slate; but make no mistake, it's the last chance we'll get—there's only one Jubilee per lifetime. Will mankind blow it again—will they sell themselves into slavery and hock the family farm? I'll tell you later.

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American Presidents are elected for four-year terms, and they get eight if they're lucky or sufficiently treacherous. The term of office for kings and dictators is a bit more nebulous—they rule for as long as they're able to hold onto power. But Yahweh promised David that through his heir the Messiah, his dynasty would *never* end. **"I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever."** (I Chronicles 22:10) This truth is the heart of the Millennium: the final King's rule shall be total, perfect, and unending. **"Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky."** (Psalm 89: 35-37)

David himself said of the Messiah, **"Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations. Yahweh preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. My mouth shall speak the praise of Yahweh, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever."** (Psalm 145:13, 20-21) Thus we who are praising Him, referred to here as "all who love Him," will live forever as well—it's a promise of eternal life. This is not just a Jewish kingdom, either. These truths are applied worldwide. **"Praise Yahweh, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples! For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of Yahweh endures forever. Praise Yahweh!"** (Psalm 117) "Forever," "everlasting," "throughout all generations"—Yahweh is describing the permanence of His kingdom. We're not used to longevity in government: Hitler's vaunted "thousand-year Reich" only lasted thirteen years. Messiah's reign, on the other hand, will be the "thousand-year *Right*," and even that is merely the gateway to an eternity under His rule—or put another way, it's merely the honeymoon preceding the years of married life.

In another messianic psalm, David again uses his own reign as a launch pad for revealing Yahweh's truth concerning the coming King. **"The king shall have joy in Your strength, O Yahweh; and in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! You have given him his heart's desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah. For You meet him with the blessings of goodness; You set a crown of pure gold upon his head. He asked life from You, and You gave it to him—Length of days forever and ever. His glory is great in Your salvation; honor and majesty You have placed upon him. For You have made him most blessed forever; You have made him exceedingly glad with Your presence. For the**

**king trusts in Yahweh, and through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved.”**  
(Psalm 21:1-7)

Daniel provides more information. **“Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.”** (Daniel 7:27) Apparently, the Jeffersonian formula we Americans tend to take as the ideal—a government “of the people, by the people, and for the people”—is off the mark just a tad. The millennial government will be “of Yahweh, by Yahshua, and for His saints.” Yahshua told His disciples, **“You are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”** (Luke 22:28-30) The saints won’t be passive bystanders in the Kingdom, but active participants.

The prophet Micah speaks of these days as well. **“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of Yahweh’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills....”** Yahshua’s physical throne will be situated in Jerusalem, located in the hills of Judea. Here we see that the elevation is not only geographical, it’s metaphorical as well: His house shall be “exalted.” **“And peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem.’”** (Micah 4:1-2) Remember, most of the Millennial mortals will have little or no “religious training.” Like Abraham, their faith, not their knowledge or righteousness, has brought them to the place of blessing.

Yahweh must like the neighborhood. He arranged to make His entrance in His first-century advent only a few miles away: **“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting....”** Why Bethlehem? The town was so close to Jerusalem, it was (according to Edersheim) used as the exclusive source of sacrificial lambs for the temple worship—despite a generalized rabbinical ban on sheep herding in the surrounding countryside. It seems Yahweh was willing to play along with the first-century priestly prejudice that there was really only one place to get a proper lamb for the atonement sacrifice—Bethlehem, the town where David had been born. Micah goes on to predict, **“And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth.”** (Micah 5:2, 4) As we have seen, Messiah operates in the strength and majesty of Yahweh because He *is* Yahweh—Emmanuel, God with us.

As Yahshua assumes the throne in Zion, it will become apparent to all that, **“The earth is Yahweh’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He**

**has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters....**” The Messiah owns the earth because He is its Creator. We owe Him our love because He made us. Man’s harebrained theories about the complexities of life evolving spontaneously, without plan or direction, will be exposed for the foolishness they are when Yahshua explains to us precisely how He founded the world—and why.

**“Who may ascend into the hill of Yahweh? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.”** Oops. *None of us* have clean hands or a pure heart. We have *all* lifted up our souls to idols one way or another. Fortunately, God provides what we lack. **“He shall receive blessing from Yahweh, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face. Selah...”** There’s the key: the requisite clean hands and pure hearts are the righteousness that God provides for us. These are the “blessings from Yahweh” that bring us into His presence. And getting us back into His presence has been the whole point of everything God has done since the third chapter of Genesis.

**“Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? Yahweh strong and mighty, Yahweh mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? Yahweh of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah”** (Psalm 24:7-10) We are used to taking these verses personally (as we should)—inviting the King of glory to come in and abide within us. But we should not forget that they are also a literal description of the literal King assuming His literal throne. This will actually happen.

And lest we lapse into provincial modes of thinking, Paul informs us that the reign of the Messiah is universal—not just over earth, but over all of Creation. **“In the dispensation of the fullness of the times God [purposed to gather] together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”** (Ephesians 1:10) Paul then told the believers at Ephesus that he prayed that God would give them enlightenment so they could understand **“what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.”** (Ephesians 1:19-21) Yahshua’s reign, in other words, exists over not only people on this earth, but over the spiritual realm as well, not just in time as we know it, but in boundless eternity.

Strangely, I don’t have too much trouble comprehending the “mighty power” required to raise the crucified Christ from the dead and seat Him at His rightful place on the throne of God—in heaven and on earth. What I have a tough time getting a handle on is the idea that the saints will participate in His glory. But Paul

swears it's true. **"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."** (Romans 8:16-18) I'm supposed to come up with a thoughtful, scholarly response at this point. But all I can say is, "Wow!"

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A recurring dream for the human race is a world without war. Will and Ariel Durant once calculated that in almost 3,500 years of recorded history, there have been only 268 years without war. (And I figure that during most of that time there *were* wars going on—being fought between groups that didn't write down what they were doing.)

Wars invariably start because party A wants something that party B is not willing to give them. It could be land or material wealth, but just as often it's freedom from tyranny or the simple right to live in peace. There is always at least one guilty party, sometimes many. Some utopian idealists have hypothesized that if there were no weapons, wars would cease. But human nature begs to differ: Cain (presumably) slew Abel either with his bare hands or with a weapon of opportunity—a rock or a stick. He didn't need a gun, a knife, or a bomb—only a bad attitude. As long as unregenerate man walks the earth, he will attack his brother. Weapons are optional.

That being said, part of Yahweh's "peace process" is ridding the world of weapons, starting with Israel herself, for whom they are the height of superfluity with Yahshua in the neighborhood. **"I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.'"** (Zechariah 9:10) Disarmament follows peace, not the other way around.

The psalmist writes, **"Come, behold the works of Yahweh, Who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. 'Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!'"** (Psalm 46:8-10) During the Millennium, nations won't have to arm themselves for defense—the King will be their shield. And nobody will be able to get away with aggressive national behavior. Thus weapons are pointless. Isaiah elaborates: **"He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people. They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."** (Isaiah 2:4) The industrial potential that

was formerly squandered on armament will be put to more productive use under Yahshua's reign. Factories will turn out tractors, not tanks.

Micah uses the same illustration. **"He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off. They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken."** (Micah 4:3-4)

Not only will nations not fight anymore, they'll feel so secure, they'll forget how. Waging war will become a lost art, like thatching roofs or making buggy whips.

The reason, of course, is that Yahshua has taken the world's government upon His shoulders. **"I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. The nations also will know that I, Yahweh, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore."** (Ezekiel 37:26-28) Again we see that Messiah will rule from Jerusalem, but His reign will extend beyond Israel—to the gentile nations. **"And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse [i.e., Yahshua], Who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious."** (Isaiah 11:10)

Like Munchkins celebrating the demise of the Wicked Witch of the West, the inhabitants of earth will rejoice at their tormentors' downfall—and they'll know Who deserves credit for their rescue: **"Yahweh, You will establish peace for us, for You have also done all our works in us. O Yahweh our God, masters besides You have had dominion over us; but by You only we make mention of Your name. They are dead, they will not live; they are deceased, they will not rise. Therefore You have punished and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish."** (Isaiah 26:12-14)

In this word from Isaiah, the king of Babylon stands in for Satan as God's people celebrate at his expense: **"How the oppressor has ceased, the golden city ceased! Yahweh has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of the rulers; He who struck the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he who ruled the nations in anger is persecuted and no one hinders. The whole earth is at rest and quiet; they break forth into singing."** (Isaiah 14:4-7) Remember the news footage of Saddam Hussein's statues being torn down in Baghdad, or Lenin's being torn down in Moscow? The jubilation the freed masses displayed will be replayed a million times over when Satan's influence is destroyed at Yahshua's coming. And the celebration will continue far longer, because unlike in Iraq or Russia, folks in the Millennium aren't merely exchanging one form of tyranny for another.

No one will be more relieved to witness Satan's fall than the repentant Jews. But like Joseph's brothers in Egypt, they may be worried about repercussions from the things they and their ancestors did in their ignorance—like crucifying the

Messiah, for instance. Yahweh reassures those who have turned from their unbelief: **“In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgressed against Me; for then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride, and you shall no longer be haughty in My holy mountain. I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of Yahweh. The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.”** (Zephaniah 3:11-13) The proud and haughty don’t seek the blessings of God—the meek and humble do. Thus when Yahshua returns, it is these meek folks who will inherit the earth—their proud cousins won’t make the cut.

Covering the same topic, Jeremiah reassures them that they won’t be held accountable for the sins of their fathers. **“In those days they shall say no more: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.”** (Jeremiah 31:29-30) The American sense of fair play tends to balk at anything that suggests punishment of one person for the sins of another. But if we were honest with ourselves and willing to look at the big picture, we would realize that it happens all the time. For the Jews, it was spelled out in the Law: **“I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.”** (Deuteronomy 5:9) A comparison of these two seemingly contradictory passages reveals something startling and wonderful about life in the Millennium. Whereas in this present world those who hate Yahweh are allowed to live out their lives—passing their poisonous animosity on to the succeeding generations—under Christ’s reign, rebellion against God will be dealt with as soon as it surfaces. It won’t be allowed to fester and grow like a cancer until it threatens to kill the body—the human race, in this case. Our attitudes and prejudices aren’t “hereditary,” but we do tend to pass them on to our children. If we hate God, that same hate is likely to show up in our children and grandchildren. But this will no longer be the case during the Millennium.

That’s not to say that no one will rebel against Yahshua in these years, just that no one will “get away with it.” The result: perfect peace. **“Thus says Yahweh of hosts: ‘Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.’”** (Zechariah 8:4-5) I foresee a population boom, both because children will be seen as a blessing (not a burden) in this world, and because no one will die before their time. Note, however, that their mortal bodies will still show their age, albeit not quite as quickly as they do today. Old folks will still need their walking canes, but seventy won’t be considered old anymore.

Isaiah elaborates. **“I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying.”** And why is that? **“No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed....”** Infant mortality will no longer torpedo the actuarial tables. And people living under God’s blessing will live to be many hundreds of years old. In fact, if someone dies as “young” as a hundred, it will be because he has rebelled against the King—he will be mourned as we would mourn a teenager who’s been shot trying to rob a convenience store—he was too young to die. Notice that some of these Millennial prophecies speak specifically of Jerusalem or Israel, and others are more general in geographical scope.

The all-too-common frustration of seeing our labors come to nothing will be a thing of the past: **“They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat. For as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of Yahweh, and their offspring with them.”** If you remember the blessings and cursings of Deuteronomy 28, you’ll recognize these things as the fulfillment of a promise: when the children of Israel returned to their God, He would once again bless them. Beyond repentant Israel, the children of the first-generation gentile “sheep” who enter the Millennium will reap the benefits of living in Yahshua’s perfect society—and they will respond in love to their Messiah. And because fellowship with Yahshua is the norm rather than the exception, even prayer will be expedited: **“It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear....”**

In short, this is nothing like the world we’re used to. It is, I imagine, more like the Garden of Eden, only without the sneaky serpent or the temptation tree. But is the world safe and secure only because Yahshua is ruling with “a rod of iron?” Are people behaving themselves merely because His government is repressive and restrictive? No. All of the earth’s creatures are participants in this peaceful paradigm shift. Even in the animal kingdom, there are no more predators, no more prey. **“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,” says Yahweh.** (Isaiah 65:19-25) Now *that’s* what I call evolution! Again, the phrase “My holy mountain” seems to be indicating that this state of affairs will exist in Jerusalem. It remains to be seen how much of the rest of the world will enjoy the same pervasive peace.

An instant replay of this imagery gives us reason for worldwide optimism. **“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow**

and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:6-9) Like Will Rogers once said, "Things ain't what they used to be—and they never were."

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Another myth the utopian dreamers have always preached is that if we can just eliminate poverty, peace will naturally follow. Actually, they've got it backwards. Prosperity is the natural result of peace, not the other way around. That's why Yahshua is called the "Prince of Peace," not the "Prince of Prosperity."

The psalmist puts it in perspective. **"I will hear what Yahweh will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints; but let them not turn back to folly."** Peace and folly are incompatible. **"Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yes, Yahweh will give what is good; and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before Him, and shall make His footsteps our pathway."** (Psalm 85:8-13) This all seems pretty obvious until you consider the converse: what is mercy *without* truth? If we condone sin, we create the impression that justice doesn't matter. But Yahweh is a just God who requires holiness, and like I said, His patience won't last forever. Mercy without truth is therefore a bomb with a delayed fuse. Tolerance of false teaching is a knife in the back. And what about peace without righteousness? That is the unstated goal of every totalitarian regime—they don't care if you're good as long as you're obedient. Neither of these errors is descriptive of the reign of Yahshua. **"Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed."** And the result is prosperity: **"Our land will yield its increase."**

Another psalm continues the thought. **"God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us. Selah. That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth. Selah...."** Tempering the emphasis of some passages, it's clear here that the Millennial blessings won't be confined to Israel, but will be spread throughout the whole earth. **"Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him."** (Psalm 67) The

prosperity the nations enjoy is directly tied to their praise of Yahweh—the grateful acknowledgment that He is the rightful King.

What does this prosperity look like? **“Behold, the days are coming,’ says Yahweh, ‘When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed. The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it....”** Ever been pleasantly surprised to find yourself with money left over at the end of the month? Felt good, didn’t it? With Yahshua at the helm, the productivity of earth will be multiplied.

Once again we are reminded of the blessings and curses Moses predicted for Israel back in Deuteronomy 28. The curses came to pass exactly as advertised in response to their disobedience. But the Millennium will see the blessings restored: **“I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them,’ says Yahweh your God.”** (Amos 9:14-15) After Israel’s brief but terrifying three and a half year exile during the Tribulation, this promise will be sweet indeed.

Zechariah expands upon the thought. **“For before these days there were no wages for man nor any hire for beast. There was no peace from the enemy for whoever went out or came in; for I set all men, everyone, against his neighbor....”** The curses of Deuteronomy had promised poverty and strife. **“But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days,’ says Yahweh of hosts....”** No, the blessings will be restored in response to Israel’s repentance. **“For the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew—I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these. And it shall come to pass that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you shall be a blessing. Do not fear. Let your hands be strong.”** (Zechariah 8:10-13)

God is not unaware of the neglect the Land has suffered, and still does in the areas where Islam is predominant. But He promises a building boom during the Millennium. **“And they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations.”** (Isaiah 61:4)

Not surprisingly, Ezekiel concurs with Isaiah: **“But you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel, for they are about to come. For indeed I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt.”** Not only will there be a building boom, but a baby boom as well. **“I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bear young; I will make you inhabited as in former times, and do better for you than at your**

**beginnings. Then you shall know that I am Yahweh.**” Zeke describes the grim conditions Israel had to look forward to in his day: **“Yes, I will cause men to walk on you, My people Israel; they shall take possession of you, and you shall be their inheritance.”** But then he predicts that Yahweh will turn the situation upside down: **“No more shall you bereave them of children.... Because they say to you, ‘You devour men and bereave your nation of children,’ therefore you shall devour men no more, nor bereave your nation anymore.... Nor will I let you hear the taunts of the nations anymore, nor bear the reproach of the peoples anymore, nor shall you cause your nation to stumble anymore, says Yahweh.”** (Ezekiel 36:8-15) Notice that Yahweh places the blame for Israel’s woes squarely on Israel’s shoulders: *they* have been causing *their nation* to stumble.

The psalmist expands Ezekiel’s thought. **“Blessed is every one who fears Yahweh, who walks in His ways. When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears Yahweh. Yahweh bless you out of Zion, and may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Yes, may you see your children’s children. Peace be upon Israel!”** (Psalm 128) Twice the psalmist declares that prosperity is contingent upon reverence for Yahweh—the awe, the godly deference, that comes naturally from a comprehension of His greatness.

The word translated “fear,” by the way, (Hebrew: *yare*) *can* mean fright or dread as well as reverence, but passages like this next one from Joel make it clear that when Yahweh says we must “fear” him, He doesn’t mean He wants us to be *afraid* of Him—but rather to show the proper respect that’s due Him. **“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for Yahweh has done marvelous things! Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field; for the open pastures are springing up, and the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their strength. Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in Yahweh your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you—the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month....”** A God who wants to bless His children like this isn’t looking for a cringing whipped-dog sort of dread or the obsequious obeisance of mind-numbing religious rituals, but rather the same kind of “fear” a four-year-old shows her loving father: she knows (from experience) that willful disobedience could easily earn her a well-deserved spanking, but she also knows that her daddy would much rather take his good girl out for an ice cream cone.

To put it in Old Testament agricultural parlance, **“The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of Yahweh your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you; and My people shall never be put to shame.”** Never, that is, *after* they return to the

reverence of Yahweh. Until then, shame and locusts (these days, it's the Muslim variety) shall be their lot. **"Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am Yahweh your God and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame."** (Joel 2:21-27)

Joel continues describing the Millennial bounty to be poured out on Israel: **"It will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a fountain shall flow from the house of Yahweh and water the Valley of Acacias...."** Israel is relatively prosperous today (in comparison with nearby nations) but this prosperity is due to Herculean effort on the part of the Jews, not the direct bounty of Yahweh. The land today is naturally dry and inhospitable—it does not “drip” with new wine, nor are the brooks “flooded with water” except immediately after an all-too-rare rainstorm. The Jews, in other words, ain't seen nothin' yet. The reference to a “fountain flowing from the house of Yahweh,” by the way, is not a metaphor. As we will later discover, it (actually *they*: there are two of them, one flowing east and the other west) are prophesied in the most specific and detailed of terms.

And lest we misunderstand God's role, Joel compares the future Israel with its neighbors: **"Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom a desolate wilderness, because of violence against the people of Judah, for they have shed innocent blood in their land...."** We have already seen how the Nile, and possibly the Gulf of Suez, will dry up, and we have examined half a dozen passages describing the utter desolation of Edom (Southern Jordan). **"But Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will acquit them of the guilt of bloodshed, whom I had not acquitted; for Yahweh dwells in Zion."** (Joel 3:18-21) It's a prophetic *fait accompli*: He *will* dwell in Zion, once Yahshua returns and sets up shop.

Just because the scriptures emphasize the Millennial blessings Israel will enjoy, we should not be unaware that these blessings will “trickle down” (like Niagara Falls) to the rest of the world. Isaiah explains. **"In this mountain [Zion] Yahweh of hosts will make for all people a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees. And He will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations."** The English is hopeless here. Let's try the New Living Translation: **"In Jerusalem, Yahweh Almighty will spread out a wonderful feast for everyone around the world. It will be a delicious feast of good food, with clear well-aged wine and choice beef. In that day He will remove the cloud of gloom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth...."** Ahh, that's better—or at least clearer.

**"He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for Yahweh has spoken. And it will be said in that day: 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save**

**us. This is Yahweh; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”**  
(Isaiah 25:6-9) That we will.

*Who* will wipe away our tears? It reads: “the Lord GOD” in the KJV, NKJV, and NASB (and “Sovereign LORD” in the NIV). The translators just can’t seem to get this right. This time it’s GOD that’s in small caps, not “Lord,” which is their usual mistake. If you check any standard reference work, you’ll see that the Hebrew is *'Adonay Yahweh*. *'Adon* (or *'Adonay*, an emphatic form of the same word), means Lord—master, owner, or ruler. *Yahweh* means “I Am,” but proper names should never be translated in usage, just spoken. The translators just choke on rendering Yahweh’s name as it’s written in the original text, almost always (and in almost every English translation) *substituting* it with a title, “the LORD.” That’s a systematic treachery I’ve harped on before. But with *'Adonay* and *Yahweh* together here, they’d have to render it Lord LORD, revealing their purposeful deception for what it is. So they bend their own fraudulent convention and replace Yahweh with GOD this time. But *El* or *Elohim* (the Hebrew words invariably used for god or God, respectively) are nowhere to be found in the text. This is all so dishonest, so purposely misleading, it makes me want to puke.

But wait, it gets worse. There are two facts you should recall. First, the name of the counterfeit Canaanite deity Ba’al literally meant “lord.” Satan has a vested interest in promoting a caricature of god in place of the real One, so if he can get us to think of Yahweh—the eternal, self-existent Creator of all things—as only a pathetic tyrant who is fixated on ruling, controlling, and owning us (as Satan would love to do), then he’s made real progress toward ensuring our demise. Second, remember that Babylonian Hebrew manuscripts were written with consonants only: the vowel points were supplied fifteen hundred years after the fact by a group of Jewish scholars (the Masoretes) who, like Satan, had a vested interest in obscuring the identification of Yahweh with Yahshua. The bottom line is that *'Adon* (Lord) is not necessarily the word in the text. All that’s there are the consonants, anglicized: *'dn*. And wouldn’t you know it, there’s another intriguing possibility for what the word means. *'Eden* (from a root meaning “to be strong”) is the Hebrew word for pedestal, foundation, or base. For example, the foundation “sockets” for the wilderness Tabernacle were called *'eden*: they, like Yahweh Himself, were what held the whole thing up. So *'dn YHWH* may actually mean “Yahweh the Foundation” or “Yahweh our Basis.”

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To my mind, one of the most obvious problems faced by “replacement theologians,” those who insist that the Church has taken over Israel’s role and its

place in the heart of God, is the immense body of prophecy predicting that repentant Israel will return to the promised land. Their theory forces them to conclude that the entire Church will be crammed into this tiny strip of land about the size of New Jersey, leaving the rest of the world vacant. The whole idea is just plain silly.

Yahweh never drove the Church anywhere in His anger, and yet we read, **“Behold, I will gather them out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, in My fury, and in great wrath; I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely....”** Tell you what; I’ll promise to stop harping on the idiocy of replacement theology if you’ll promise to remember that Yahweh knows exactly what He’s doing—the promises He’s made to Israel will be fulfilled in Israel, and those to the Ekklesia, in the Ekklesia. Deal? **“They [that’s Israel] shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.’** For thus says Yahweh: **‘Just as I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will bring on them all the good that I have promised them.’**” (Jeremiah 32:37-42)

Since it’s my intention to look at *all* the pieces in this ten-thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle, it shouldn’t come as a surprise that many of them look quite similar. The return of Israel is—to stretch my metaphor—that big patch of sky in our picture that’s all pretty much the same color. We’ve already put scores of puzzle pieces into place in this area, but we aren’t done yet—not by a long shot.

All of the Old Testament prophets have something to say about Israel’s return, so perhaps it would make sense to organize our discussion by who’s delivering the message. Let’s continue with Jeremiah, then. **“Thus says Yahweh: ‘Behold, I will bring back the captivity of Jacob’s tents, and have mercy on his dwelling places. The city shall be built upon its own mound, and the palace shall remain according to its own plan.’**” Jerusalem will be restored to its former glory, and then some. **“Then out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of those who make merry. I will multiply them, and they shall not diminish; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small. Their children also shall be as before, and their congregation shall be established before Me; and I will punish all who oppress them.”** Israel will once again, as in the days of David and Solomon (and rarely since then), be a great people, respected among nations and blessed by Yahweh. **“Their nobles shall be from among them, and their governor shall come from their midst. Then I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach Me; For who is this who pledged his heart to approach Me?’** says Yahweh. **‘You shall be My people, and I will be your God.’**” (Jeremiah 30:18-22) The civil rulers of the new state of Israel will be Jews (which might seem like an obvious thing to

say unless you remember their history for the last two thousand years—up until 1948). Mortals assigned to positions of responsibility will have a proven heart for God. Beyond that, we should remember Yahshua’s promise to His disciples: because of their service and devotion, they (as immortals) were to “judge the twelve tribes of Israel.” And “Church-age” immortals will “judge the world.” (I Corinthians 6:2) Everyone, of course, will ultimately answer to Yahshua Himself.

What does Micah have to say? **“In that day,’ says Yahweh, ‘I will assemble the lame; I will gather the outcast and those whom I have afflicted; I will make the lame a remnant, and the outcast a strong nation. So Yahweh will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on, even forever....”** We’re reminded here that the Jews are not going to do anything in their own strength; they’re the lame and the outcast, with no power to effect change over their ostensibly pitiful destiny—outside of their decision to trust in Yahweh. **“And you, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, even the former dominion shall come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.”** (Micah 4:6-8) He’s saying that the kingdom will be based in Jerusalem, not Washington D.C., Moscow, London, or even Tel Aviv. But the sins of Israel will keep them separated from their God until the nation is spiritually reborn: **“Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel.”** (Micah 5:3)

He continues: **“I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel. I will put them together like sheep of the fold, like a flock in the midst of their pasture; they shall make a loud noise because of so many people. The one who breaks open will come up before them; they will break out, pass through the gate, and go out by it. Their king will pass before them, With Yahweh at their head.”** (Micah 2:12-13) In other words, Yahshua will personally gather Israel and lead them out of their exile, and not one or two at a time, but a vast crowd.

The eloquent Isaiah was given information concerning Israel’s return as well. **“A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others....”** Only those who have been cleansed by accepting the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah may enter into Yahshua’s kingdom. This will prove to be more and more significant a distinction as the Millennium wears on and people are born who choose not to avail themselves of God’s grace—they will be barred from both Jerusalem and the highway that leads to it, whether metaphorical or literal. **“Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; it shall not be found there....”** You don’t have to be brilliant or brave to come into the kingdom, only willing. **“But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of Yahweh shall return and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”** (Isaiah 34:8-

10) Israel as a people have known their share of sorrow during the last four thousand years. But all of that is about to change.

Isaiah continues: **“Thus says the Lord Yahweh: ‘Behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations, and set up My standard for the peoples. They shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; they shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am Yahweh, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me.’”** (Isaiah 49:22-23) The gentile nations, especially their leaders, will expedite the return of the Jews to their land, not with conniving malice this time, but with respect and reverence. For the first time since Solomon reigned, it will be obvious to the nations that Yahweh is on Israel’s side and that they are the apple of His eye. So the gentiles will do everything they can to make the Jews’ homecoming a pleasant experience, for they too now worship Yahshua the King.

Now let’s hear from Zechariah. **“Thus says Yahweh of hosts: ‘Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; I will bring them back, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness.’”** (Zechariah 8:7-8) Does any of that sound familiar? It should.

**“I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph....”** The implication is that not only those who are aware of their Jewish roots but also those who have no idea who they really are—descendants of Joseph—a.k.a. Ephraim, a.k.a. the Samaritans, a.k.a. the “ten lost tribes” of Israel’s Northern Kingdom—will be included in the great regathering. **“I will bring them back, because I have mercy on them. They shall be as though I had not cast them aside; for I am Yahweh their God, and I will hear them. Those of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as if with wine. Yes, their children shall see it and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in Yahweh....”** Remember that Zechariah wrote during the second temple period—circa 520-470 B.C. The Northern Kingdom (whose dominant tribe was Ephraim) had been toast for over two hundred years, presumably absorbed irretrievably into the Assyrian melting pot. Zechariah says it doesn’t matter: God knows who are His. **“I will whistle for them and gather them, for I will redeem them; and they shall increase as they once increased. I will sow them among the peoples, and they shall remember Me in far countries. They shall live, together with their children, and they shall return....”** The Babylonian exile had already ended when Zechariah wrote this. So whether the “gathered” of Israel had been scattered in the past by the Assyrians or the Babylonians, or would be later by the Romans or the Muslims, their descendents will be brought back to Zion by the Messiah. Note that logically, these redeemed ones of Israel must still be mortals—not raptured saints—for they are still bearing children and populating the earth *after* the

regathering; Yahshua taught that “in the resurrection there is no marriage,” hence no more procreation.

**“I will also bring them back from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon, until no more room is found for them. He shall pass through the sea with affliction, and strike the waves of the sea: all the depths of the River shall dry up. Then the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart. So I will strengthen them in Yahweh, and they shall walk up and down in His name,’ says Yahweh.”** (Zechariah 10:6-12) Lebanon, as we saw back in chapter 6, is part of Israel as far as Yahweh’s definition is concerned (see Numbers 34). Gilead is today’s northwestern Jordan—formerly Ammonite territory and at one time settled by the Israelite tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. Egypt and Assyria are Israel’s perennial antagonists—geographical bookends that, along with Jordan, surround the promised land. We’ve reviewed the fate of Jordan (i.e., Ammon, Moab, and Edom) and it isn’t pretty. Here we’re being told that in the Millennium, Egypt and Assyria will pose no threat—indeed, many of the returning sons of Israel will actually come from these two lands. This leads me to conclude that both these nations are home to significant Israelite populations who have lost track of their heritage—swallowed up first by the conquests of ancient Egypt and Assyria and later by the aggressive imperialism of Muhammad’s followers. They have no idea that they might be descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But God knows who they are, and He has promised to redeem a remnant from among them.

That is a remarkable thing to say. Yahweh is saying that even though these areas are all in Muslim hands today, a remnant will (1) survive the Tribulation (and more to the point, live through the devastating Battle of Magog), (2) turn to Yahweh in faith, (3) somehow learn of their Israelite lineage, and (4) return to the Land of Promise. It seems likely that this Israelite remnant is the primary constituent of the amazing Millennial prophecy we reviewed a few chapters back: **“In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land, whom Yahweh almighty shall bless, saying, ‘Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.’”** (Isaiah 19:23-25) How ironic it is that some nations who follow a religion dedicated to driving the Jews out of the Land are themselves populated with children of Israel who will one day live there under God’s blessing. Who says Yahweh doesn’t have a sense of humor?

Hosea seems to be hinting at the same thing. **“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ there it shall be said to them, ‘You are sons of the living God.’ Then the children of Judah and the**

**children of Israel** [i.e., Jews from both the Southern and Northern Kingdoms—from all twelve tribes] **shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel!**" (Hosea 1:10-11) Jezreel is a euphemism for Israel. It literally means "God will sow," as we saw in the Zechariah 10 passage above. Hosea seems to be saying that multitudes of people who presumed they were gentiles will discover their Jewish roots—and with them their Jewish Savior. The irony is delicious.

But after all these years—after generations of cultural obscurity—how will these people come to know of their Jewishness? Will Yahshua simply inform the lucky winners? *Surprise! You're Jewish!* It could be as simple as that, but I rather imagine that the circumstances will be somewhat more ominous. With the advent of DNA technology, it became possible to trace family trees through similarities in genetic profiles. Back in chapter 10, I explained how the science works. Now think back to our discussion of the Mark of the Beast. It isn't much of a stretch to imagine starting a worldwide DNA database as part of the Antichrist's "world without crime" program. When you sign up for the Mark, a blood sample would be taken—something by which every human on the planet (according to the brochure) could be positively identified, sort of like a universal fingerprint database on steroids. But because of his *real* agenda, the Antichrist would then have each DNA profile screened for Jewish characteristics—something that would show up in the mitochondrial DNA, passed along intact from mother to daughter.

*Wait a minute!* you say. *Everybody who took the Mark of the Beast is dead by this time. The stealth Jews still wouldn't know who they were.* Boy, you're sharp today. But consider this. Suppose your mother took the Mark, and came back later and announced to the family, "Guess what? I'm Jewish! It showed up in my DNA sample, and I didn't even know it. All this time I thought we were Catholics." I wouldn't be surprised to learn that the rules determining Jewish bloodlines were well known by this time—that (at least according to rabbinical tradition) if your mother is Jewish, so are you. Bottom line, both you and your brothers and sisters would know you were Jewish whether you took the Mark or not. Granted, this line of reasoning is all highly speculative. I'm not trying to establish doctrine here; only point out that the "Israel" that Yahshua gathers back into the Land may include people who don't know they're Jews when the Tribulation begins.

Okay; let's check in with the prophet Zephaniah. **"Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! Yahweh has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, Yahweh, is in your midst; you shall see disaster no more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: 'Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. Yahweh your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will**

**rejoice over you with singing....”** Note once again that the “Yahweh” who assumes the throne of Israel is Yahshua: they are the same entity. Nobody is happier about the return of Israel than Yahweh/Yahshua Himself. Isaiah described the Messiah in His first advent as a “man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.” But here we see Him so happy, He breaks out in song. That’s quite a picture.

**“I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly, who are among you, to whom its reproach is a burden. Behold, at that time I will deal with all who afflict you; I will save the lame, and gather those who were driven out; I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame....”** We are reminded of the mark of life being put on the foreheads of those who wept over the sins of Israel (cf. Ezekiel 9:4-7). It was their contrite, broken attitude that singled them out for God’s protection, in contrast to the arrogance of those who indulged in idolatry. **“At that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you; for I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes,’ says Yahweh.”** (Zephaniah 3:8-20) Fame and praise? As Peter wrote, **“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”** (I Peter 5:6) What’s true for individuals is also true for nations.

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We didn’t hear from Ezekiel in that last segment, but that’s not because he didn’t have anything to say. Zeke’s emphasis in the following passage, however, isn’t so much on Israel’s return as on their repentance. We begin by observing that Israel’s cleansing takes place after their regathering begins. (That may seem pretty obvious now that they—some of them—have officially been back in the Land since 1948. But how would Ezekiel have known that? He wrote this stuff down in the sixth century B.C.) **“For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them....”** Then, as if to reverse the order of events we just saw, Yahweh says, **“Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses....”** What gives? Is God confused? No. Commencing the gathering process and seeing Israel dwell in the Land under God’s blessing are two separate things. Israel will never be secure in the Land until they turn to Yahshua in repentance. At the moment, there any number of ways they could lose their national sovereignty, not to mention their lives. But the scene will be played out just as Great Playwright wrote it.

First the gathering begins (it began in earnest after World War II), then the cleansing and deliverance (which will take place during the Tribulation). Then Israel's ingathering will be completed, culminating in the blessings of Yahshua's kingdom, and accompanied by their heartfelt remorse for their past national evils. **"I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations. Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations."** The spirit of the Day of Atonement—affliction of the soul—will linger on long after October 3, 2033. Israel will not soon forget their national guilt. **"Not for your sake do I do this," says the Lord Yahweh, 'let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!...'"**

Israel will also experience a baby boom as Yahweh's restoration proceeds. Historically, the population of Israel (both within the Land and without) has been relatively flat—a little over two births per woman on average. But it's already on the rise. In 2012, the Israeli birth rate was 2.67 (compared to 4.57 in the Gaza Strip, down from seven or eight among Palestinian Arabs only a few decades ago). And Israel's population is really going to swell during the Millennium. **"Thus says the Lord Yahweh: 'I will also let the house of Israel inquire of Me to do this for them: I will increase their men like a flock. Like a flock offered as holy sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem on its feast days, so shall the ruined cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they shall know that I am Yahweh.'" (Ezekiel 36:24-32, 37-38)**

Time and time again Yahweh revisits this theme: He will restore a repentant Israel to greatness, and the gentiles will glorify God because of this. Yahweh put it this way through His prophet Isaiah: **"For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns. The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of Yahweh will name."** Something tells me that name *won't* be "Palestine." **"You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of Yahweh, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no longer be termed Forsaken; nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate. But you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah. For Yahweh delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you...."** Remember back in Psalm 102, when Yahweh predicted that the very name of Israel's people would be used against them as a curse? Indeed, the Nazis were only the tip of the iceberg. The name "Jew" has far more negative connotations than positive ones in today's world. Knee-jerk anti-Semitism is, contrary to all reason, still rampant in many nations. One might presume that as Yahshua blesses Israel during the Millennium, a jealous world might continue this trend of blind hatred, but here we see that the converse is true—Israel and her King will be honored. *Hephzibah*

means “My delight is in her,” and *Beulah* means, “to have dominion over” (in the sense of a husband having dominion over his wife in that culture); the thought seems to be that the world will look to Israel as a submissive wife would look to her husband—as the authority in the home, the one who is responsible before God for providing guidance and sustenance. I realize that *Beulah* is not a very politically correct word these days. Deal with it.

Isaiah continues. **“I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of Yahweh, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth....”** I thought the Hebrew word for “watchmen” here might be our old friend *natsar* (one who guards), translated “watchmen” in Jeremiah 31:6—the same word used for “Christians” in modern Hebrew. But it wasn’t. The word used here is *shamar*, from a primitive root meaning to hedge about as with thorns, thus to guard, protect, or attend to. Though there is no linguistic tie to Christians here, I can’t help but see echoes of the Ekklesia in this passage, the ones who hedge Israel about with their prayers and will continue to do so until Yahshua calls us home. Isaiah implores us not to give Yahweh a moment’s peace—peppering heaven with a constant barrage of prayer beseeching Him to “make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” But this is a Millennial passage. In the long run, and in context, the “watchmen” are children of Israel who have learned through the bleak days of the Tribulation to “make mention of Yahweh.” God is encouraging them not to give up, not to stop praying for their deliverance and restoration—no matter how dark it gets before the dawn.

**“Yahweh has sworn by His right hand and by the arm of His strength: ‘Surely I will no longer give your grain as food for your enemies; and the sons of the foreigner shall not drink your new wine for which you have labored. But those who have gathered it shall eat it, and praise Yahweh; those who have brought it together shall drink it in My holy courts....’”** Again we see a reversal of the cursings of Deuteronomy 28, something that can only happen with the reconciliation of Israel to Yahweh.

**“Go through, go through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Take out the stones, lift up a banner for the peoples! Indeed Yahweh has proclaimed to the end of the world: ‘Say to the daughter of Zion, “Surely your salvation is coming. Behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.”’ And they shall call them The Holy People, the Redeemed of Yahweh; and you shall be called Sought Out, a City Not Forsaken.”** (Isaiah 62) The return and repentance of Israel are pivotal to the plan of Yahshua. His people shall be redeemed and made holy (i.e., they will be set apart for His honor), and they will dwell in the very presence of God.

Leave it to David to teach us something of the mindset of repentant Israel. This is a prayer fit for the ultimate Day of Atonement. **“For Your name’s sake, O Yahweh, pardon my iniquity, for it is great. Who is the man that fears Yahweh? Him shall He**

teach in the way He chooses. He himself shall dwell in prosperity, and his descendants shall inherit the earth....” After the agony and terror of the Tribulation, the Jews who turn to Yahshua will see their hope restored, but their pride and self-sufficiency will have vanished. **“The secret of Yahweh is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant. My eyes are ever toward Yahweh, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net. Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have enlarged; bring me out of my distresses! Look on my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins. Consider my enemies, for they are many; and they hate me with cruel hatred. Keep my soul, and deliver me; let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for You. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all their troubles!”** (Psalm 25:11-22) Yahweh intends to do precisely that.

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Having returned from exile among the nations of the world, and having repented of her idolatry by recognizing and accepting Yahshua as Messiah, Israel will at last be ready to fulfill her destined role in the Millennial Kingdom. Yahweh, for His part, has been encouraging Israel to accept this glorious role ever since they first became a nation: **“I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am Yahweh their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am Yahweh their God.”** (Exodus 29:45-46)

In fact, just before Moses informed the Israelites of the blessings and cursings that awaited them based upon what they did with Yahweh’s instructions, he told them of God’s intentions—*without* any strings attached. **“Also today Yahweh has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to Yahweh your God, just as He has spoken.”** (Deuteronomy 26:18-19) Moses was saying they should keep Yahweh’s commandments *because* they were His “special people,” not in order to gain that status. Their God promised to honor them above all other nations—but He didn’t say when. As we have now learned, it won’t happen until they’ve repented and turned to their Messiah, and *that* won’t happen completely until the very end of the Tribulation.

But why would Yahweh want to exalt Israel over the other nations in the first place? It think it has more to do with demonstrating who He is than with giving perks to His chosen family. **“He has declared to His people the power of His works in giving them the heritage of the nations.”** (Psalm 111:6) Let’s face it, making Israel the world’s leading nation would appear to be about as close to impossible as it gets.

Granting them “the heritage of the nations” would certainly prove the power of Yahweh, for no earthly power—including Israel itself—could accomplish that, even if they wanted to.

No one had quite as much to say about Israel’s role in the Millennium as Isaiah did. But the picture he paints contrasts glaringly with the history of his nation since he wrote these words. **“Lift up your eyes all around, and see: they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be nursed at your side.”** He begins by recounting for the umpteenth time the regathering of Israel back into the Land. **“Then you shall see and become radiant, and your heart shall swell with joy, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you; the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you....”** Hebrew poetry depends on thought parallels, the restatement of a concept in different words. Here we see how the sea became a metaphor for the gentiles (as the Land is for the Jews). Gentile wealth will flow to Israel, and it will come by sea.

And it will come by land. **“The multitude of camels shall cover your land, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and incense, and they shall proclaim the praises of Yahweh. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you. They shall ascend with acceptance on My altar, and I will glorify the house of My glory.”** (Isaiah 60:4-7) On the three sides of Israel not bordered by the sea, Muslim nations stand poised to push her into the Mediterranean—an endeavor they have tried and failed to achieve several times during the last half-century. So it is with some surprise that Isaiah tells us that the *Arabs* will come bearing gifts to Israel, eager to “proclaim the praises of Yahweh.” As we have seen, the War of Magog will destroy *dar al-Islam*, leaving at best a sixth of the Middle-Eastern Muslims alive. But one of the Islamic nations that will likely sustain the least amount of damage during this conflict is Saudi Arabia (though Jeremiah 25 lists Dedan, Tema, Buz, Zimri, and **“all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed multitude who dwell in the desert”** among the nations who will feel the lash of God’s wrath). Here we see that the inhabitants of the birthplace of Muhammad (those few who are left) have come full circle, worshipping Yahweh and honoring Israel. Moreover, since we see them playing their part in the Millennial worship of Yahshua, it means that this Arab remnant must have discovered (and embraced) the truth sometime between the rapture and the end of the Tribulation!

Isaiah continues: **“Who are these who fly like a cloud, and like doves to their roosts? Surely the coastlands shall wait for Me; and the ships of Tarshish will come first, to bring your sons from afar, their silver and their gold with them, to the name of Yahweh your God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because He has glorified you....”** The gentiles, and especially their commercial interests—now stripped of their “Babylonian” component—will assist in the repatriation of Israel. And this time the Jews will

not come empty handed, as they did after World War II, but will bring “their silver and gold with them.” Note also that they “fly like a cloud...like doves.” Yes: doves with *El Al* emblazoned on their tails, I imagine. The idea of flying to Israel is just one more of those prophecies that could not have been literally fulfilled before a few decades ago.

**“The sons of foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you. For in My wrath I struck you, but in My favor I have had mercy on you. Therefore your gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day or night, that men may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles, and their kings in procession. For the nation and kingdom which will not serve you shall perish, and those nations shall be utterly ruined....”** In stark contrast to Israel’s traditional attitude of self-sufficiency, Yahshua will require all nations (not just the Americans, goaded on by their Christian constituency) to contribute to their glory. It will be like it was in the days of Solomon, only more so. This is a confirmation of the Zechariah 14 prophecy we saw in the previous chapter predicting that all the families of the earth will pay homage to Yahshua every year during the Feast of Tabernacles. **“The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the pine, and the box tree together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of My feet glorious....”** The object (at least one of them) of all this gentile treasure flowing into Jerusalem is their contribution to the building of Yahshua’s new temple, something we’ll explore in detail in the next chapter.

I am willing to suspend my natural pre-rapture cynicism here and conclude (SF4) that this is not a tax or obligation imposed upon the nations, but rather a voluntary contribution indicative of a heartfelt desire to worship Yahshua and honor His chosen people. The reason is that at the beginning of the Millennium (after the “goats” have been set aside), every person on earth is a true believer in Yahshua—Jews and gentiles alike—and they’re all too aware of the reality of their salvation. The descendants of Israel’s enemies will see the error of their fathers’ ways: **“Also the sons of those who afflicted you shall come bowing to you, and all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet; and they shall call you The City of Yahweh, Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, so that no one went through you, I will make you an eternal excellence, a joy of many generations. You shall drink the milk of the Gentiles, and milk the breast of kings; you shall know that I, Yahweh, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob....”** There it is again, the reason for all of this change of fortune for Israel: so that they will at last *know* their Savior.

Passages like this make it clear why certain factions within the Church insist that *they* have inherited the promises of Israel—who wouldn’t want to be honored like this? But in order to be this national entity “drinking the milk of the gentiles,” you’d have to (1) be currently in a state of rebellion and disbelief, (2) become at some point willing to repent—turn around and think differently—from your

current opinion, (3) have a history of being afflicted and persecuted, “forsaken and hated” by the world, (4) be physically residing within the land of Israel, specifically occupying Jerusalem, and perhaps trickiest, (5) be in a position to explain who the devout “gentiles” are who are going to bring you all this good stuff. Adherents of Replacement Theology (a.k.a. Covenant Theology, a.k.a. Supersessionism) today can’t or won’t admit to any of these conditions. In refusing to countenance what Yahweh plainly says about the restoration of His chosen people Israel, they must ignore, allegorize, brush off, reinterpret, or flat-out deny huge portions of divine writ, ultimately forcing them into a position where they have to deny the existence of the Millennium altogether (a theory called Amillenarianism). Fortunately, Yahweh knows precisely what He’s doing. The Jews, of course, are just as clueless as the Replacement Theologians at the moment, but they’re about to get their eyes opened.

But I digress. We were back in the Millennium. In short, this is going to be an incredible time to be a Jew in Jerusalem. **“Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver, instead of wood, bronze, and instead of stones, iron. I will also make your officers peace, and your magistrates righteousness. Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.”** (Isaiah 60:8-18) During the Millennium, peace, righteousness, salvation, and praise won’t have to be enforced on the populace by “officers and magistrates,” with “walls and gates.” They will be the natural order of things. Israelis who read this passage today must moan, *When? This is nothing like the Israel I know. Violence, waste, and destruction lurk around every corner. We struggle for every shekel, and the land is watered with our tears.* Yes, and it’s going to get far worse before it gets better.

The contrast between Biblical prophecy and present reality continues in Isaiah’s next chapter. **“Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the foreigner shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.”** Arab Israelis form the backbone of the “servant class” in Israel today, but that’s not what the prophet is talking about, for he continues, **“But you shall be named the priests of Yahweh. They shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, and instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double. Everlasting joy shall be theirs. “For I, Yahweh, love justice; I hate robbery for burnt offering; I will direct their work in truth, and will make with them an everlasting covenant.”** The gentiles won’t respect Israel until Israel respects Yahweh; they won’t honor the God of Israel until Israel herself honors Him. Yet when the Jews finally return to Yahweh, they will be blessed by man and God alike. **“Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people. All who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the posterity whom Yahweh has blessed....”**

So great will be the chasm between the curses to which Israel has subjected herself for the past two-thousand-plus years and the blessings her repentant remnant will enjoy in the Millennium, her children will surely shake their heads and wonder, How could our fathers have missed this? **“I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh; my soul shall be joyful in my God. For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord Yahweh will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.”** (Isaiah 61:5-11) No honest Jew today can claim that these verses are a reality in the life of his people. But they will be.

A few chapters later, Isaiah continues the theme. **“Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her. Rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her; that you may feed and be satisfied with the consolation of her bosom, that you may drink deeply and be delighted with the abundance of her glory....”** Those of us who love Jerusalem and mourn for her plight will have ample reason to rejoice when the King graces her with His glory. **“For thus says Yahweh: ‘Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream. Then you shall feed; on her sides shall you be carried, and be dandled on her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.’ When you see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like grass”** (Isaiah 66:10-14) Here is a tender picture of comfort and restoration: Yahweh’s beloved Israel has fallen down and scraped her knee, but the gentile neighbors have picked up the crying child, brought her home—to Israel, and specifically, to Jerusalem—to the comforting arms of her mother, her *Ruach Qodesh*, the Holy Spirit. And these concerned good neighbors (the “sheep” in Yahshua’s metaphor) have dried her tears, provided medicine, a bandage, and a big chocolate chip cookie to make her feel better. Or something like that.

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Isaiah spoke of “peace like a river” flowing to Jerusalem, and “the glory of the gentiles” gushing like a stream to Israel. Apparently, Zion will return the favor. It’s hinted at by the psalmist: **“There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.”** (Psalm 46:4) *It’s only a metaphor*, you might be thinking, *a picture of Yahweh’s blessings being poured out on the Millennial world from his holy temple.* It is that, no doubt, but I believe it also refers to a literal river that will flow from the future temple. As a matter of fact, Zechariah describes it: **“In that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea. In**

**both summer and winter it shall occur. And Yahweh shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—'Yahweh is one,' and His name one."** (Zechariah 14:8-9)

Needless to say, there is no such river at the present time. It is obvious that for this to be true, there will have to be major geological changes in the substructure of the Land or Yahweh will have to provide an ongoing miracle. It may be a little of both. We have already seen that immediately before the end of the Tribulation, the greatest earthquake in history occurred—beginning near Jerusalem and working its way throughout the tectonic regions of the earth, leveling mountains and submerging islands. So it's a reasonably safe assumption that the structure of the earth's crust is no longer what it used to be. Zechariah's prophecy speaks of a river flowing in two directions from Jerusalem—west toward the Mediterranean, and east toward the Dead Sea. This is not some seasonal flash-flood sort of affair, either; he specifically states that these will be year-round rivers. And it's fascinating that he connects the formation of these new rivers with the ascension of Yahweh/Yahshua (who is pointedly described as "One") to the throne of earth.

To find out why (as if we couldn't guess), we need to flip back to Ezekiel. He was shown a detailed vision describing the worship and geography of the Millennial kingdom—a lengthy passage we'll study in our next chapter. We pick up the narrative as an angel shows Zeke around the new temple. **"Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. He brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side"** (Ezekiel 47:1-2) This is no metaphor; the description is specific and detailed. Ezekiel is being shown the source of the river that runs east, toward the Dead Sea. The water flows from beneath the temple, originating from the south side, then turning to flow eastward.

If the Millennial temple is within half a mile of where Solomon placed T1, then water flowing from that area would naturally drain into the Kidron Valley on the east side of the Temple Mount, emptying into the Hinnom Valley on the south. From there it would flow eastward toward the Jordan River Valley, then south to the Dead Sea. The defeat of death itself is being pictured. The Hinnom Valley, you see, was the prototype for the Jewish conception of hell. In the bad old days, the inhabitants of the area sacrificed children to the Canaanite god Molech in this place, and in later times, the valley (also known as *ge-hinnom*, or Gehenna) became Jerusalem's city dump. Trash fires burned here perpetually, making it an apt and ready metaphor for the fires of hell. As we shall see presently, the water that will flow from beneath the temple will heal whatever it touches, bringing life and bounty with it wherever it runs, including its ultimate destination, the Dead Sea. (I think they're going to have to rename it.) The river is

thus a potent portrait of the salvation provided by Yahshua, who once said, **“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”** (John 4:14)

On the other hand, if you’ll recall, the Mount of Olives was split in two when Yahshua returned, creating a big east-west valley through the middle of it. Depending on the elevation of the valley floor, this could easily form the channel of the new eastward river, bypassing the Valley of Hinnom altogether. (The Mount of Olives is in the right location—east of the temple mount on the far side of the Brook of Kidron.) But this only makes the picture more stunning: Christ’s salvation *doesn’t* flow through hell; those who choose to go there won’t benefit at all from the living water that courses everywhere else. We shall soon see, however, that the temple from which the rivers flow will not be located on Solomon’s temple mount at all, but a few hundred yards northwest of the old site—the place of Christ’s crucifixion. But I believe that with all the topographical changes that have been wrought, the picture/lesson is the same.

Ezekiel wasn’t nearly done. **“And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits [about 500 yards], and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist. Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed....”** The stream started as a rivulet but before it had gone a mile and a quarter it had grown into a rushing river. It’s not clear whether this is due to new springs feeding the stream as it makes its way downhill, or due to a creative miracle on the part of Yahweh. Either way, I’m impressed: in that part of the world a river big enough to swim in is miraculous any way you slice it. The farther the living water flowed downstream, the more volume it carried. Salvation is like that. Each soul redeemed by Yahshua touches others, adding to the torrent of holiness flowing through the earth.

**“He said to me, ‘Son of man, have you seen this?’ [In other words, *This is important, Zeke. Pay attention.*] Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river. When I returned, there along the bank of the river were very many trees on one side and the other. Then he said to me: ‘This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the [Dead] sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi [near the middle of the western shoreline] to En Eglaim [farther north,**

near Qumran]; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea [i.e., the Mediterranean], exceedingly many. But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt. Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.” (Ezekiel 47:3-12) Trees? Fish? Been to Israel lately? The neighborhood he’s talking about isn’t exactly the land of milk and honey—it’s more like the land of silt and Humvees. It’s as barren as the moon.

Maybe we’re talking about geological upheaval as well. The Dead Sea is the lowest spot on the face of the earth—its surface averages about 1,280 feet *below* sea level. The reason it’s “dead” is that at that elevation, it can have no outlet. If the great Day-of-Atonement earthquake were to split the Arabah, allowing the waters of the Gulf of Aqaba to flow into the Dead Sea, the entire Jordan Valley would become a salt-water marsh. (To put things in perspective, even the Sea of Galilee, at its northern end, is 690 feet below sea level.) As long as we’re speaking in blue-sky hypothetical terms though, what would happen if the Big One caused a general uplifting of the elevation of the entire Jordan River Valley area, from Lake Huleh southward, by maybe eight or nine hundred feet? After all, Isaiah reported, **“Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth. The glory of Yahweh shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.”** (Isaiah 40:4-5) The Dead Sea could then—once its surface reached a few feet above sea level—empty *into* the Gulf of Aqaba,—eventually healing the oceans. The Sea would then be perhaps twice as long and half again as wide as it is now—Jericho would be prime beachfront property—but once the salt levels equalized, it would be capable of supporting all kinds of marine life. The idea that the Dead Sea will indeed empty into the Gulf of Aqaba is implied by Ezekiel, who reported, **“Everything will live wherever the river goes.”**

This admittedly wild theory (one I would blush to even assign a speculation factor to) is supported by a subtle hint dropped into Ezekiel’s narrative. The new Dead Sea fishing industry will be concentrated in the northern half of the sea. Why is that? Not coincidentally, the same thing is true of the Sea of Galilee: all the major fishing towns (like Capernaum) were clustered along its northern shore. The answer, it turns out, is quite simple. The waters are more oxygen rich where the streams feeding the lake enter than where they exit, which is something the fish prefer. And fishermen congregate where the fish are most plentiful. The implication is that in the newly healed Dead Sea, the flow will remain from north to south, strongly suggesting an exit into the Gulf of Aqaba.

That, however, reminds us of an unresolved problem: sometime during the Tribulation, in the second bowl judgment, **“Every living creature in the sea died.”** (Revelation 16:3) So where did the breeding stock come from? I see three possible explanations. (1) “Every” is a conversational exaggeration, simply meaning “the vast majority.” (2) Some marine life was sheltered from the plague in bodies of water not included in what John described as “the sea.” Or (3) Yahshua recreated or resurrected the flora and fauna of the oceans as he healed the waters from their blood-like state. I don’t have a problem with any of these theories. Take your pick or come up with a scripturally sound alternative of your own.

The bottom line is that the oceans and seas (though only the Dead Sea is specifically mentioned) will be restored to their former bountiful condition, or even *better*, since no fish live in the Dead Sea today. (Perhaps as a preview of things to come, it has recently been discovered that undersea fresh water springs are feeding the Dead Sea; and more surprisingly, considering the sea’s high magnesium content, certain bacteria are thriving there.) Bear in mind that Ezekiel was discussing only the eastward river. Zechariah also mentions a second, westward-flowing river that empties into the Med. One way or another, metaphorically and physically, healing flows from Yahshua’s temple in Jerusalem, and it will eventually reach every corner of the earth.

God’s restoration of the Millennial world will be spectacular. Not only will the earth—especially Israel—be healed from the ravages of the Tribulation, it will once again be transformed into the kind of paradise that man hasn’t known since the days of the patriarchs. **“The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of Yahweh, the excellency of our God.”** The best part of the beautiful new surroundings will be the glory of God dwelling here among men. Therefore, Isaiah encourages those living through the bad times, promising Yahweh’s timely intervention. **“Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you.’ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing.”** The healing miracles of Yahshua’s first-century advent will be seen once again in the earth—probably on a much larger scale. Note the order of things: first vengeance against God’s enemies, then salvation for His friends, then the physical healing of their bodies and their land. **“For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; In the habitation of jackals, where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes.”** (Isaiah 34:1-7)

Deserts are apparently going out of style in Israel. Isaiah continues: **“For Yahweh will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of Yahweh. Joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.”** (Isaiah 51:3) It’s tempting to imagine that this kind of restoration will happen all over the earth. I believe that it could, but won’t—not everywhere. On one hand, the rivers flowing east and west from the temple will heal every place their waters touch. On the other hand, places whose people refuse to honor Yahshua are promised drought (cf. Zechariah 14:16-19). Egypt and Edom are singled out in scripture as nations who will suffer this fate. Though everyone who enters the Millennium will be a believer, their children will have to make up their own minds, and their choices will determine whether they will receive God’s blessings or not.

Some who are familiar with the final chapters of Revelation are saying, *Boy those river prophecies from Zeke and Zack sure sound familiar*. Yes, they should. Here’s what John saw: **“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”** (Revelation 22:1-2) The puzzle here is the timing. John’s statement comes near the end of a discussion of a “new heaven and new earth,” which is very different from the restored Millennial world. (We’ll cover the subject in a later chapter.) John speaks of one river; Zechariah describes two. Ezekiel says the river flowed from beneath the temple, but John’s description specifically says that there is no temple in the New Jerusalem, and that the water flows instead from God’s throne. We must conclude, then, that John’s river is not the same as the ones described by Ezekiel and Zechariah, however similar they look. The Millennium is a dress rehearsal for the eternity that follows. In the same way, I get the feeling that the Millennial rivers are like an Artist’s sketch, but the one that flows from the New Jerusalem is the actual painting—God’s masterpiece.

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These rivers aren’t the only place where we run into a bit of confusion between the Millennial kingdom and the eternity that follows. Consider the issue of light. Again, we’re dealing with an area with strong metaphorical overtones: to shed light upon something is to reveal truth, and that’s what Yahweh is all about.

But the scriptural record presents some apparent contradictions on the subject (just as it did with the rivers). The solution is to be found in separating the Millennial kingdom facts from those dealing with the new heaven and new earth

that will follow. The key to the time period we're seeing in any given passage is the *source* of the light. It's often tricky—we need to keep our eyes open: *both* times are spoken of in this example, **"The Mighty One, Yahweh our God, has spoken and called the earth from the rising of the sun to its going down. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth."** (Psalm 50:1-2) In the first statement, the sun is still in view; in the second, however, God is seen as the source of light. We have crossed over from Millennium to eternity in mid-paragraph.

Keeping this distinction in mind, let's look at a few informative passages. Isaiah writes, **"The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that Yahweh binds up the bruise of His people and heals the stroke of their wound."** (Isaiah 30:26) We're definitely talking about the Millennium here, since the sun is the earth's light source. But the sun's light will be increased by a factor of seven. This is characterized as a good thing, so we must presume that there is no accompanying increase in heat as we saw in the Tribulation's fourth bowl judgment—it's not a plague; it's a blessing. We aren't really given enough information to be dogmatic about it, but we might logically presume that this gift of extra sunlight will shorten growing seasons, nourish oceanic phytoplankton (the free floating photosynthetic flora that convert inorganic compounds into complex organic compounds—the very foundation of the marine food chain), and accelerate the regrowth of the forests lost during World War III, when one third of the world's trees were burned up. How Yahweh intends to do this without turning the earth into a charcoal briquette is beyond my meager scientific understanding. Maybe (SF8) He intends to restore the earth's water-vapor canopy (that some theorize surrounded our planet before the flood of Noah—a protective barrier so dense that it took forty days and nights to precipitate onto the earth). The Millennium is all about restoration, so it's a distinct possibility.

When the thousand years are gone, however, Yahweh has a whole new thing planned. The centerpiece of the new heaven and the new earth is called the New Jerusalem, of which John wrote, **"The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light."** (Revelation 21:23)

I freely admit that I've got no earthly idea how this is going to work. But we can be reasonably certain that as a source of light and energy Yahweh Himself will prove to be infinitely superior to the flaming ball of hydrogen and helium that's been serving us so faithfully for the past who-knows-how-long—a sun that He Himself created with the snap of His fingers, so to speak. All I can really do is wonder in awe at the greatness of God and point out the Old Testament confirmation: **"Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of Yahweh is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people...."** This will be literally fulfilled during the Tribulation, if you recall. **"But Yahweh will arise**

**over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising....**" This is, in admittedly poetic language, what we've seen as a way of life during the Millennium: the gentiles will honor Israel as they come to worship at the feet of Yahshua.

A few verses later, we've shifted our paradigm into high gear: the energy source for the New Jerusalem, the eternal city (something we'll cover in depth later), is described. **"The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but Yahweh will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory. Your sun shall no longer go down, nor shall your moon withdraw itself; for Yahweh will be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended."** (Isaiah 60:1-3, 19-20) It's no accident that the prophet associated the eternal light of Yahweh with the end of mourning. Ever since the first sin in the Garden of Eden, man has shown a propensity to be in awe of big, bright, shiny things in the sky. In our fallen state, it was only a matter of time before we deified the sun and moon, and Satan was ready and waiting with a plethora of variations on the theme—anything to get us to take our eyes off the one true God. Don't assume that the worship of the sun or the moon is a relic of a bygone age, either. Today, 1.3 billion Muslims worship their moon god, Allah, and the subtle inroads of Mithra-style sun god worship are still plaguing many of the rest of us—even within the Church—whether we know it or not. So we shouldn't be surprised to see that, once we've all made our choices, Yahweh would eliminate the sun and moon altogether. **"Then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed; for Yahweh of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously."** (Isaiah 24:23) When we finally realize the difference between Creator and creation, then **"Yahweh will be [our] everlasting light, and the days of [our] mourning shall be ended."**

## The Millennial Temple

If you're watching a football game on television and a really great play happens, they usually show it again from a different camera angle. Prophecy may not be football but I think we've shown that it's definitely a contact sport. And the Millennium is the Biblical equivalent of a 98-yard punt-return touchdown: from the field, it looked extremely unlikely when the ball was first kicked. It's clearly worthy of an instant replay.

More to the point, we haven't yet explored all the scriptures relating to the Millennium—not by a long way. In the previous chapter we looked at this amazing time from a geo-political perspective: the restoration of the earth, the emergence of Israel, and the peace and prosperity the world will enjoy. Now we need to concentrate on what Yahweh has planned for worship in the Millennium. We'll find He has a great deal to say about the millennial temple and its service, as well as the disposition of the tribes of Israel within the Land.

Yahweh is anything but ambivalent concerning Israel. He is enthusiastically working toward the goal of living there among His chosen people. **“Thus says Yahweh of hosts: ‘I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her.’ Thus says Yahweh: ‘I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of Yahweh of hosts, the Holy Mountain.”** (Zechariah 8:2-3) His intentions toward Jerusalem are crystal clear and repeated throughout scripture to the point of ennui. The prophecies aren't all generalized overviews like this one, either. God is very detailed and very specific in his revelation concerning this people and their Land.

After repeating Yahweh's declaration of undying zeal, Zechariah gets us started with a review of the world's attitude toward Israel, especially during the Tribulation: **“Thus says Yahweh of hosts: ‘I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal. I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease; For I was a little angry, and they helped—but with evil intent.’”** The Antichrist, you'll recall, made quite a show of being Israel's champion in the face of universal anti-Semitism, but his motives were self centered and satanically inspired. **“Therefore thus says Yahweh: ‘I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘and a surveyor's line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem.... My cities shall again spread out through prosperity; Yahweh will again comfort Zion, and will again choose Jerusalem.’”** (Zechariah 1:16-17) As we shall soon see, God already has the plans drawn up—His temple, His city, the tribal disposition of Israel, the whole nine yards.

The anchor text for this whole area of exploration is the final nine chapters of the Book of Ezekiel. There Yahweh gave His prophet some startlingly detailed

information about what His final temple and its environs were going to look like, and how they were to function. I'll warn you right up front, there are some surprises here—areas where our preconceived ideas might get sacked and thrown for a twenty-yard loss.

As we begin, the prophet is languishing in Babylonian exile, no doubt muttering “I told you so” to anyone who would listen. And then this happened: **“On April 28, during the twenty-fifth year of our captivity—fourteen years after the fall of Jerusalem [that would make it 572 B.C.]—Yahweh took hold of me. In a vision of God He took me to the land of Israel and set me down on a very high mountain. From there I could see what appeared to be a city across from me toward the south. As He brought me nearer, I saw a man whose face shone like bronze standing beside a gateway entrance. He was holding in his hand a measuring tape and a measuring rod. He said to me, ‘Son of man, watch and listen. Pay close attention to everything I show you. You have been brought here so I can show you many things. Then you will return to the people of Israel and tell them everything you have seen.’”** (Ezekiel 40:1-4 NLT) Israel’s captivity officially began when some of the inhabitants of Judah, Ezekiel and Daniel among them, were carted off to Babylon (in 597 B.C.). The city and temple were destroyed eleven years later because of the rebellious attitude of Judah’s Babylonian-approved leaders. Thus it is important to keep in mind that as Ezekiel wrote this prophecy, Solomon’s temple was gone, but by no means forgotten.

By the way, I have opted to use the New Living Translation for the whole nine-chapter Ezekiel section. The vision is full of dimensions, stated in the original Hebrew in cubits. The NLT, however, has translated all these dimensions into feet and inches so we Americans can more easily relate to the sizes specified in the prophecy. The “standard” Hebrew cubit was about 18 inches, but there was also a Hebrew “long cubit” of a “cubit plus a handbreadth.” This long cubit is specified in Ezekiel, and it’s calculated in the NLT as 21 inches. It’s worth noting that some scholars contend that the standard cubit equaled six handbreadths, and the long cubit added a seventh. That would introduce Yahweh’s six-plus-one lesson plan into every dimension given here. I can’t personally vouch for the accuracy of the cubit length used in this translation, but it’s certainly in the ballpark. If anything, the proper figure for the long cubit might be a little longer—up to 24 or 25 inches.

He begins by describing the wall and the east gateway of the temple compound. **“I could see a wall completely surrounding the Temple area. The man took a measuring rod that was 10½ feet long [i.e., six cubits, perhaps an indication that the areas being measured are for man’s use and benefit. This rod is an even 12 feet if your long cubit is 24 inches] and measured the wall, and the wall was 10½ feet thick and 10½ feet high.”** This is no mere fence, but a formidable barrier one story tall (in our parlance) and as thick as it is high. **“Then he went over to the gateway that goes**

through the eastern wall. He climbed the steps and measured the threshold of the gateway; it was 10½ feet deep. There were guard alcoves on each side built into the gateway passage. Each of these alcoves was 10½ feet square, with a distance between them of 8¾ feet along the passage wall. The gateway's inner threshold, which led to the foyer at the inner end of the gateway passage, was 10½ feet deep. He also measured the foyer of the gateway and found it to be 14 feet deep, with supporting columns 3½ feet thick. This foyer was at the inner end of the gateway structure, facing toward the Temple...."

Don't think of a "gate" as a little door in a white picket fence surrounding the tidy front yard of a New England cottage. In Biblical parlance, a gate (Hebrew *sha'ar*) is the entrance to a significant place, a walled city—or the temple. The English word "portal" comes closer to the idea. This "gate," protruding in toward the courtyard from the wall of the temple compound, was a significant building in its own right, 43 feet 9 inches wide by 87 feet 6 inches in length. It was centered in the eastern wall.

"There were three guard alcoves on each side of the gateway passage. Each had the same measurements, and the dividing walls separating them were also identical. The man measured the gateway entrance, which was 17½ feet wide at the opening and 22¾ feet wide in the gateway passage. In front of each of the guard alcoves was a 21-inch curb. The alcoves themselves were 10½ feet square. Then he measured the entire width of the gateway, measuring the distance between the back walls of facing guard alcoves; this distance was 43¾ feet. He measured the dividing walls all along the inside of the gateway up to the gateway's foyer; this distance was 105 feet. The full length of the gateway passage was 87½ feet from one end to the other. There were recessed windows that narrowed inward through the walls of the guard alcoves and their dividing walls. There were also windows in the foyer structure. The surfaces of the dividing walls were decorated with carved palm trees." (Ezekiel 40:5-16 NLT)

I realize that all these dimensions and descriptions are hard to follow and visualize. But studious folks like Paul Jablonowski have built models based on Ezekiel's description of the final temple; you can view several of them at <http://www.sonstoglory.com/ThirdTempleEzekielsMillennialTemple.htm> . One model builder has pictured the gate structures and the temple proper about ten stories tall, which may or may not be accurate (since we aren't told the height dimensions), but the rest of it, as far as I can tell, looks pretty much like what Ezekiel saw—which is spectacular.

The temple itself is to be situated in a smaller courtyard within the larger compound. "Then the man brought me through the gateway into the outer courtyard of the Temple. A stone pavement ran along the walls of the courtyard, and thirty rooms were built against the walls, opening onto the pavement. This pavement flanked the gates and extended out from the walls into the courtyard the same distance as the gateway entrance [i.e., 77 feet—the length of the gate minus the thickness of the wall]. This was the

**lower pavement. Then the man measured across the Temple's outer courtyard between the outer and inner gateways; the distance was 175 feet.**" (Ezekiel 40:17-19 NLT) The inner courtyard was accessed via gates corresponding to and directly across from the gates in the perimeter wall. The portals protrude inward into the compound from the outer wall, and outward into the compound from the wall of the temple courtyard. These inner and outer gate structures were separated from each other by 175 feet of clear space, giving us an idea of the scale of the place—it's even larger than St. Peter's Square in Rome.

Ezekiel describes in the following verses (20-37) how there were a total of six gateways, all identical—three centered in the outer walls on the east, south, and north sides and three others directly across from them leading to the inner courtyard. (This smaller court backed up against the western wall, so there were no gates there.) Here we once again encounter Yahweh's familiar six-and-one pattern—six gates, and the seventh structure is the temple itself. The temple compound is thus the very picture of God's plan for mankind: the six "gates" represent six millennia through which fallen man had to pass to approach our God, and the "temple" represents the last millennium, symbolizing Yahweh residing with man.

The layout is also symbolic of our salvation. In order to reach the temple, one first has to pass through the outer gates, symbolic of being born of water (physical birth). This puts him in the outer compound—mortal life. But to reach the temple, he must also be born of the Spirit, represented by the gates leading to the inner courtyard. Yahshua explained this to Nicodemus: **"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again' [literally, 'from above']."** (John 3:5-7) As there is a passage to be made from non-living to living in the physical realm, so also is there a passage from non-living to living in the spiritual.

But note the directions the gates point—all of them extend inward toward the large courtyard that represents physical, mortal life. The gates represent choice. No one may choose to be born physically, so there are no gates protruding outward from the outer wall. But once one has entered the courtyard of physical life, there are two destinations to choose between. One can either choose to enter the inner courtyard where the temple is, or he can return to the realm of the non-living. Or, of course, he can just wander aimlessly through the outer court, oblivious of the choices set before him. The question is: can he do this indefinitely? I'm afraid I'm going to have to defer the whole discussion of eternal destinies for a later chapter. Right now, we're merely exploring the architectural metaphors God has laid before us. But you've got to admit, they're intriguing.

This, then, is the basic layout of the Millennial temple complex. On elevated ground somewhere north of the main city of Jerusalem, a large outer court surrounds a small inner court in which the temple itself stands. Six gates, or portals, lead inward or outward from the outer court. Guard alcoves are built into the gate structures, and thirty rooms line the inner perimeter of the outer wall.

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So far, so good. But here's where most Christians' assumptions concerning God's intentions toward the "Law of Moses" begin to fall apart: **"A door led from the foyer of the inner gateway on the north side into a side room where the meat for sacrifices was washed before being taken to the altar. On each side of this foyer were two tables, where the sacrificial animals were slaughtered for the burnt offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings. Outside the foyer, on each side of the stairs going up to the north entrance, there were two more tables. So there were eight tables in all, four inside and four outside, where the sacrifices were cut up and prepared. There were also four tables of hewn stone for preparation of the burnt offerings, each 31½ inches square and 21 inches high. On these tables were placed the butchering knives and other implements and the sacrificial animals. There were hooks, each three inches long, fastened to the foyer walls and set on the tables where the sacrificial meat was to be laid."** (Ezekiel 40:39-43 NLT) *What? Animal sacrifices? I thought Christ's sacrifice did away with all that. Sure, the Jews in the Old Testament had to make sacrifices according to the rules laid down in the Law to atone for their sins, but Jesus was the Lamb of God. So when the Jews reinstated animal sacrifices for a short time during the Tribulation, they were merely demonstrating—again—that they'd rejected Christ's sacrifice. Right?*

Not right. They were merely being obedient for a change. The Torah said these things were to go on "throughout their generations." But why would Yahweh still be interested in animal sacrifices *after* the reality they represent—the sacrifice of the Messiah—became a historical fact? Why would these rites be performed *after* the Messiah whom they foretold had returned to Earth and had been received by the nation of Israel, as He had been by the Church? We need to keep an eye on the big picture. Ask yourself: how were people reconciled to Yahweh between Adam's day and Moses' giving of the Law? What were gentiles who never heard of Moses supposed to do to find their way back to God? Why would Yahweh allow the Babylonians to destroy the temple if the Jews' atonement for sin *depended* on the ritual of *Yom Kippurim* to have their sins forgiven? Did Yahweh simply forget about whole generations of people who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, leaving them high and dry?

Would a loving God simply cut off the vast majority of humanity without providing a way to get back to Him?

No. It's not in His nature. Our relationship with Him is the whole point of creation. In and of itself, the Levitical shedding of the blood of bulls and goats was *never* efficacious in atoning for sins—it was merely a picture, a metaphor, for the coming sacrifice of Yahshua. It is the *reality* that saves—not the shadow cast by that reality. The bottom line? No one was ever reconciled to God except through the blood sacrifice of Yahshua, whether looking forward to the event in faith, or back on it—again, in faith.

We don't have to comprehend all the details. It probably isn't even essential that we know His name. As a matter of fact, most people (even Christians) *don't* know His name, not really. "Jesus" is a transliteration of a transliteration of the Greek *Iesous*, and even that name was not spelled out in any of the pre-Constantinian manuscripts, but instead indicated with Greek capital initials with a line scribed above them—a device scholars call a *nominum sacrum*. "Jesus" is a derivation of a name that has lost one hundred percent of the significance of the Hebrew name God gave Him: Yahshua (= "The Self-Existent One Saves"), and even here there are several plausible spellings—Yahowsha', Yahusha, Yahuwshuwa', Yahushua, Yəhowsu'a, Yāhowshuwa', Yāhowshu`a, Y<sup>e</sup>howshu'a, Yehoshua, Yēhōšūā', Yeshua, Yahoshua, Yeshuwa', Y'shua, or Yahshua—depending on which scholar you consult. I suppose if you called me "Harvey" a couple of thousand times, I'd eventually pick up on the idea that you were talking to me and not some invisible six-foot-tall rabbit standing next to me. But my name isn't Harvey, and it never will be. The point is that our faith in—and acceptance of—God's plan for our reconciliation is what He's interested in, whether we know all the specifics or not (though it seems a shame we can't even get His name right). The picture He gave us is a valuable teaching aid (cf. Hebrews, chapters 7-10), but it's still only a picture.

Which brings us back to animal sacrifices in the Millennial temple. What's the point of doing them, if they don't save anyone? The Levitical sacrifices in the Old Testament didn't save anyone either, so the point will be the same as it was back then: they're a picture of God's plan. Remember, there will be billions of mortal men and women walking the earth in the centuries following the Tribulation, and if left to their own devices, they will be just as clueless as to the loving intentions of Yahweh as the Jews were in Moses' day—especially since during the Millennium overt sin will be confronted and dealt with immediately. They will need instruction, guidance—*pictures* explaining how fallen man can and must be reconciled to God. When their children ask the Millennial patriarchs, "Why do they kill all those animals at the temple, daddy?" the door will be open to explaining what Yahshua, the King, did for them the first time He came.

Okay, back to Ezekiel's temple tour. **"Inside the inner courtyard there were two one-room buildings for the singers, one beside the north gateway, facing south, and the other beside the south gateway, facing north. And the man said to me, 'The building beside the north inner gate is for the priests who supervise the Temple maintenance. The building beside the south inner gate is for the priests in charge of the altar—the descendants of Zadok—for they alone of all the Levites may approach Yahweh to minister to him....'"** Here we begin to see similarities and differences between T4 and T1. As in Solomon's temple, there will be a division of labor of between groups of priests and Levites—there are special rooms for the singers and the priests assigned to temple upkeep, for instance. But the hierarchy of the Aaronic priesthood has been redefined: now only the descendants of Zadok will directly minister before Yahweh. Remember that name. We'll come back to him later.

Now we approach the temple itself. **"Then the man measured the inner courtyard and found it to be 175 feet square. The altar stood there in the courtyard in front of the Temple. Then he brought me to the foyer of the Temple. He measured its supporting columns and found them to be  $8\frac{3}{4}$  feet square. The entrance was  $24\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide with walls  $5\frac{1}{4}$  feet thick. The depth of the foyer was 35 feet and the width was  $19\frac{1}{4}$  feet. There were ten steps leading up to it, with a column on each side."** (Ezekiel 40: 44-49 NLT) Even the dimensions tell us something. The outer court, as we saw, is quite large—presumably because it must accommodate many worshippers at one time. But although the entrance to the temple proper is spacious, there is nothing intimidating about it. Its scale is quite human-friendly, which tells us something about the God who designed it: He is far more concerned about relating to us than He is about impressing us. **"After that, the man brought me into the Holy Place, the large main room of the Temple, and he measured the columns that framed its doorway. They were  $10\frac{1}{2}$  feet square. The entrance was  $17\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide, and the walls on each side were  $8\frac{3}{4}$  feet wide. The Holy Place itself was 70 feet long and 35 feet wide...."** The Holy Place, then, is accessed through a  $17\frac{1}{2}$ -foot-wide opening at the back of (and almost the entire  $19\frac{1}{4}$ -foot width of) a 35-foot-long foyer.

**"Then he went into the inner room at the end of the Holy Place. He measured the columns at the entrance and found them to be  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet thick. The entrance was  $10\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide, and the walls on each side of the entrance extended  $12\frac{1}{4}$  feet to the corners of the inner room. The inner room was 35 feet square. 'This,' he told me, 'is the Most Holy Place....'"** The floor plan is generally like Solomon's temple and the Tabernacle that preceded it, but with the addition of the foyer. T4 may be slightly larger in scale than T1 (35 feet in width as opposed to 30 feet) due solely to the implied difference in the length of the cubit—the standard 18 inch cubit of Solomon versus the "cubit and a handbreadth" or Hebrew long cubit specified in Ezekiel. Actually though, both records call for a width of 20 cubits, and there's a raging controversy among scholars about the precise length of the cubit Solomon used, so we don't really know. The *first* version of all this, the wilderness Tabernacle,

was 10 cubits wide and high—it was basically a half-scale prototype for the “permanent” temple.

“Then he measured the wall of the Temple and found that it was 10½ feet thick. There was a row of rooms along the outside wall; each room was 7 feet wide. These rooms were built in three levels, one above the other, with thirty rooms on each level. The supports for these rooms rested on ledges in the Temple wall, but the supports did not extend into the wall. Each level was wider than the one below it, corresponding to the narrowing of the Temple wall as it rose higher. A stairway led up from the bottom level through the middle level to the top level....” This seems to be saying that the alcoves in the walls were to be deeper as the levels ascended, making the inner, supporting wall thinner at each level. This is our first hint as to the height of the temple—three stories—again, not terribly impressive as “religious” buildings go, but rather one designed on a human scale, a reflection of Yahweh’s desire for intimacy with us.

“I noticed that the Temple was built on a terrace, which provided a foundation for the side rooms. This terrace was 10½ feet high. The outer wall of the Temple’s side rooms was 8¾ feet thick. This left an open area between these side rooms and the row of rooms along the outer wall of the inner courtyard. This open area measured 35 feet in width, and it went all the way around the Temple. Two doors opened from the side rooms into the terrace yard, which was 8¾ feet wide. One door faced north and the other south....” From the viewpoint of the courtyard, then, the temple would appear at least four stories high. It could, of course, be taller.

“A large building stood on the west, facing the Temple courtyard. It was 122½ feet wide and 157½ feet long, and its walls were 8¾ feet thick. Then the man measured the Temple, and he found it to be 175 feet long. The courtyard around the building, including its walls, was an additional 175 feet in length. The inner courtyard to the east of the Temple was also 175 feet wide. The building to the west, including its two walls, was also 175 feet wide....” As we shall see in Ezekiel chapter 42, the temple was flanked on the north and south sides with three-story outbuildings located outside the inner courtyard. But *this* large building was situated “out back,” i.e., to the west. (The only door to the temple proper faced the east.)

“The Holy Place, the Most Holy Place, and the foyer of the Temple were all paneled with wood, as were the frames of the recessed windows. The inner walls of the Temple were paneled with wood above and below the windows. The space above the door leading into the Most Holy Place was also paneled. All the walls were decorated with carvings of cherubim, each with two faces, and there was a palm tree carving between each of the cherubim. One face—that of a man—looked toward the palm tree on one side. The other face—that of a young lion—looked toward the palm tree on the other side. The figures were carved all along the inside of the Temple, from the floor to the top of the walls, including the outer wall of the Holy Place....” The “interior decoration” of the temple is fraught with significance. Wood is used extensively in the interior—a precious

commodity in itself by this time, since a third of the trees on earth were burned up during World War III. More to the point, wood, unlike stone or glass, is a living thing—its use is a reminder of the life Yahweh has provided. The windows mentioned earlier admit light to the interior, for Yahweh is the God of truth and light. And the carved decorations, dual-faced cherubim, speak of the two natures of Yahshua the King: His humanity and His sovereign deity.

**“There were square columns at the entrance to the Holy Place, and the ones at the entrance of the Most Holy Place were similar. There was an altar made of wood, 3½ feet square and 5¼ feet high. Its corners, base, and sides were all made of wood. ‘This,’ the man told me, ‘is the table that stands in Yahweh’s presence....’”** This is a scaled-up version of the altar of incense that was placed in the Holy Place in the Tabernacle (cf. Exodus 30:1-10). **“Both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place had double doorways, each with two swinging doors. The doors leading into the Holy Place were decorated with carved cherubim and palm trees just as on the walls. And there was a wooden canopy over the front of the Temple’s foyer. On both sides of the foyer there were recessed windows decorated with carved palm trees.”** (Ezekiel 41 NLT) As doors go, these are huge. If you’ll recall, the entrance to the Holy Place was 17 feet 6 inches across, and that of the Most Holy Place, 10 feet 6 inches. I think we can safely assume that doors that wide will be somewhat taller than your standard American 6 feet 8 inches—they could be several stories high. We’re getting some insight into why the walls need to be as thick as they’re described.

**“Then the man led me out of the Temple courtyard by way of the north gateway. We entered the outer courtyard and came to a group of rooms against the north wall of the inner courtyard. This group of structures, whose entrance opened toward the north, was 175 feet long and 87½ feet wide. One block of rooms overlooked the 35-foot width of the inner courtyard. Another block of rooms looked out onto the pavement of the outer courtyard. The two blocks were built three levels high and stood across from each other. Between the two blocks of rooms ran a walkway 17½ feet wide. It extended the entire 175 feet of the complex, and all the doors faced toward the north [i.e., away from the temple itself]. Each of the two upper levels of rooms was narrower than the one beneath it because the upper levels had to allow space for walkways in front of them. Since there were three levels and they did not have supporting columns as in the courtyards, each of the upper levels was set back from the level beneath it. There was an outer wall that separated the rooms from the outer courtyard; it was 87½ feet long. This wall added length to the outer block of rooms, which extended for only 87½ feet, while the inner block—the rooms toward the Temple—extended for 175 feet. There was an entrance from the outer courtyard to these rooms from the east.”** (Ezekiel 42:1-9 NLT) This terraced three-story building on the north side of the temple was mirrored by one on the south (verses 10-12). In fact, the whole temple complex is perfectly symmetrical, its centerline running through the east-west axis of the temple.

**“Then the man told me, ‘These rooms that overlook the Temple from the north and south are holy. It is there that the priests who offer sacrifices to Yahweh will eat the most holy offerings. And they will use these rooms to store the grain offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings because these rooms are holy....”** Now you know what happens to the meat roasted in the sacrificial offerings, as well as the grain and other offerings that are brought: they are for the use and sustenance of the priests on duty. It is one of God’s ways of allowing His people to participate in His provision. **“When the priests leave the Holy Place, they must not go directly to the outer courtyard. They must first take off the clothes they wore while ministering because these clothes are holy. They must put on other clothes before entering the parts of the building complex open to the public....”** The whole temple service is designed to symbolize the holiness of Yahweh—His separateness from His creation. The garments the priests wear are symbolic of imputed righteousness, without which they may not (and cannot) minister before God. But the priests cannot pass this righteousness to others—each worshipper must receive God’s gift for himself.

**“When the man had finished taking these measurements, he led me out through the east gateway to measure the entire Temple area. He measured the east side; it was 875 feet long. He also measured the north side and got the same measurement. The south side was the same length, and so was the west side. So the area was 875 feet on each side with a wall all around it to separate the holy places from the common.”** (Ezekiel 42:13-20 NLT) In case you’ve lost track, the 875 foot width breaks down as follows: 87 feet 6 inches for the length of the northern gate, plus 175 feet clear area, plus 87 feet 6 inches for the inner gate, plus 87 feet 6 inches to the centerline of the temple (175 feet for the whole inner courtyard); then repeat all of that to get to the outside of the southern gate. And if you’re wondering, yes, all of this *will* fit on the temple mount—barely (its shortest dimension, the southern edge, measures 910 feet). But as we shall soon learn, this magnificent, perfectly square edifice won’t end up being squeezed onto the herky-jerky quasi-trapezoid that is the temple mount—and not just because of all of the anything-but-holy cultural and religious baggage that’s associated with it. The Millennial Jerusalem will be barely recognizable, a far, far cry from the present city, right down to a radically altered topography.

In fact, there seems to be a translation glitch that the NLT scholars have taken upon themselves to “correct”—without so much as margin note. The actual Hebrew they’ve translated “875 feet” (i.e., 500 cubits), is *chamesh mey’ah qaneh* (five hundred *reeds*) in verses 17, 18, 19, and 20—a dimension that, if we’re using the definition of “reed” or “rod” from Ezekiel 40:5, comes out to almost a mile! But in verse 16, the first time the number is used, the text reads *chamesh ’ammah qaneh*. Is *’ammah* another word for “hundred?” No. It literally means “mother of measure,” and it’s the usual word translated “cubit” (i.e., the length of the forearm). But as *Strong’s* notes, the word when substituted for *mey’ah* means

100 cubits. Therefore it would appear that in these verses a “reed” does not take the technical definition of “six cubits,” but merely means a unit of measure, hence the NLT translators are perfectly justified in their conclusion: the measurements listed in verses 16 to 18 mean “500 (long) cubits,” or about 875 feet.

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We interrupt this architectural treatise to bring you an important announcement. A *very* important announcement. **“After this, the man brought me back around to the east gateway. Suddenly, the glory of the God of Israel appeared from the east. The sound of his coming was like the roar of rushing waters, and the whole landscape shone with his glory. This vision was just like the others I had seen, first by the Kebar River and then when he came to destroy Jerusalem. And I fell down before him with my face in the dust. And the glory of Yahweh came into the Temple through the east gateway.”** (Ezekiel 43:1-4 NLT) No man alive would have been better equipped to appreciate the significance of this vision than Ezekiel. This very man had witnessed God’s glory depart in a similar vision some years before.

Some highlights from his account: **“The cloud filled the inner court. Then the glory of Yahweh went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of Yahweh’s glory....”** This is part of the familiar “wheel within a wheel” vision. Though it’s a fascinating study, I’m not going to explore all the rich imagery here, but merely cut to the chase: **“Then the glory of Yahweh departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of Yahweh’s house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.”** (Ezekiel 10:3-4, 18-19) The Glory of Yahweh departed from the temple in stages—leaving via the eastern gate. Then, after another of scripture’s ubiquitous prophecies about the future restoration of Israel, Ezekiel reports: **“So the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was high above them. And the glory of Yahweh went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain which is on the east side of the city.”** (Ezekiel 11:22-23) Which mountain is that? It’s the Mount of Olives, just across the Kidron Valley from the temple mount—the very spot from which the risen Yahshua (who is the “glory of Yahweh” in human form) ascended to heaven after instructing His disciples—the very spot to which He will return on the Day of Atonement.

Ezekiel in his earlier vision had seen the Shekinah—the Glory of God—depart from the temple. Now he sees it returning—as before, via the eastern gate. **“Then the Spirit took me up and brought me into the inner courtyard, and the glory of Yahweh**

filled the Temple. And I heard someone speaking to me from within the Temple. (The man who had been measuring was still standing beside me.)” God Himself now addresses the prophet: “And Yahweh said to me, ‘Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place where I will rest my feet.’” Not to be picky, but the Shekinah doesn’t *have* feet. Yahweh is referring to His manifestation as the Son of Man—King Yahshua will enter the temple courtyard through the eastern gate, and it will be closed behind him. “I will remain here forever, living among the people of Israel. They and their kings will not defile my holy name any longer by their adulterous worship of other gods or by raising monuments in honor of their dead kings. They put their idol altars right next to mine with only a wall between them and me. They defiled my holy name by such wickedness, so I consumed them in my anger. Now let them put away their idols and the sacred pillars erected to honor their kings, and I will live among them forever....”

Yahweh is “putting His money where His mouth is,” so to speak. He’s declaring that when He comes in His glory to the temple Ezekiel has been describing in such great detail, He will never again depart, *ever* (that is, as long as mortal man walks the earth), for Israel will have repented by then—permanently and completely. The Chief Priests who had Yahshua crucified in 33 A.D. had been given an important clue—one they ignored: Yahshua *could not* have come to reign on the earth at that time because the temple He entered didn’t match Ezekiel’s excruciatingly detailed vision. Yet Daniel’s prophecy (9:25-26) had pinpointed that very moment as the time Messiah would come. The only possible conclusion was that there would be two advents fulfilling two bodies of seemingly contradictory prophecy.

This passage also punches big holes into the notion that the present polluted temple mount will be the location of the final temple. The eastern gate to the temple mount, the one that the Muslim warlord Saladin walled up in 1187 to prevent the Jewish Messiah from returning, couldn’t be the eastern gate Ezekiel was referring to. There are to be *two* eastern gates, one facing the other across the outer court, and the way they’re described in Ezekiel 40—as massive buildings over 87 feet long—doesn’t remotely equate to the small bricked-in passageway on the eastern wall of the temple mount.

By the way, note that Yahweh roundly denounces “hero worship” as idolatry. He specifically named “other gods” and “dead kings,” making me shudder when I contemplate American edifices like the Washington Monument. And I think we can safely extrapolate the principle for our times: do not raise political figures, sports heroes, or entertainment stars to the level of demigods in your imagination. Your favorite presidential candidate can’t accomplish anything outside of the framework of God’s sovereignty. Heaven and earth do not turn upon the platform of any political movement, no matter how right or beneficial you think it may be. Worship Yahweh alone.

Yahweh now tells Ezekiel, **“Son of man, describe to the people of Israel the Temple I have shown you. Tell them its appearance and its plan so they will be ashamed of all their sins. And if they are ashamed of what they have done, describe to them all the specifications of its construction—including its entrances and doors—and everything else about it. Write down all these specifications and directions as they watch so they will be sure to remember them. And this is the basic law of the Temple: absolute holiness! The entire top of the hill where the Temple is built is holy. Yes, this is the primary law of the Temple.”** (Ezekiel 43:5-12 NLT) Here we are being told by God Himself that the design and specifications of the temple reflect and demonstrate the very holiness of Yahweh. Everything within the temple compound is said to be metaphorical of the nature of Yahweh or some aspect of His plan of redemption. It’s very magnificence should shame the guilty heart into repentance.

We are given another clue here as to the precise location of the temple: as it says in the NKJV, **“The whole area surrounding the mountaintop shall be most holy.”** (Verse 12) If you’ll recall, the site of the present temple mount doesn’t cover the highest peak of Mount Moriah—the mountain *top*—but only the part that was enclosed within Jerusalem’s ancient city walls. The far more significant portion of Moriah is northwest of the temple mount, the summit outside the city wall (also known as Bezetha or Bizita—a.k.a. Golgotha), the place where Yahshua’s blood was spilled, where His broken body rested in a tomb, and where He rose triumphantly under His own power. As I pointed out back in chapter 13, I believe the Ark of the Covenant was secreted away in a cave beneath this part of the mountain by the prophet Jeremiah during the Babylonian invasion. And through a divinely orchestrated series of events, the blood of Yahshua was literally, physically sprinkled upon the mercy seat, atoning for the sins of all mankind once and for all, if only we would accept His sacrifice. It’s no wonder Yahweh told Ezekiel that the mountaintop would be holy. I would guess (SF2) that the Millennial Temple’s Most Holy Place will be positioned at Golgotha, directly above the resting place of the Ark, 1,500 feet or so northwest from where it was in Solomon’s temple.

And what about the Ark itself? Will that be hauled up and placed in the new Holy of Holies? No. Yahweh has kept His promise; it has served its purpose. There will be no more blood sprinkled upon the mercy seat. Yahshua is an impossible act to follow, especially if you’re a bull or a goat. The very man who apparently secreted the Ark out of the Holy of Holies and hid it beneath Mount Moriah wrote: **“It shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days,’ says Yahweh, ‘that they will say no more, “The ark of the covenant of Yahweh.” It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore. At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of Yahweh, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of Yahweh, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with**

**the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers.”** (Jeremiah 3:14-18) The Ark will be neither essential temple ritual furniture, nor museum attraction, nor the object of legendary quests. Jeremiah specifically says that no one will even make a replica of it during the Millennium. In the light of Yahshua’s presence, it will simply be forgotten.

Since Yahweh almost never gives revelation on a particular subject to only one prophet, we shouldn’t be too surprised to see a confirmation of Ezekiel’s prophecy about the temple site being on a holy mountaintop in Isaiah’s writings: **“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of Yahweh’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem.”** (Isaiah 2:1-3) Golgotha, the place of Yahshua’s execution, is located at the base of a low cliff, the top of which is the summit of Mount Moriah. I don’t think there can be much doubt that this area is the “mountain of Yahweh’s house” spoken of by the prophet. The passage also implies that the geologic upheaval of the Day of Atonement (in which “a tenth of the city fell—or was lowered in elevation—Revelation 11:13) will cause Moriah’s peak to be uplifted above its present elevation, and indeed above all the other peaks in the vicinity.

That’s not the only geologic upheaval that will take place. Zechariah too speaks of a radically altered topography: **“All the land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem.”** Geba is about five miles north-east of Jerusalem, and Rimmon is some thirty-five miles south-west. That whole forty-mile stretch is hilly terrain today—but it will be a flat plain during the Millennium. **“Jerusalem shall be raised up and inhabited in her place from Benjamin’s Gate to the place of the First Gate and the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananeel to the king’s winepresses. The people shall dwell in it; and no longer shall there be utter destruction, but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.”** (Zechariah 14:10-11) In context, Zechariah has just finished describing the two rivers (verses 8-9) flowing from Jerusalem that we read about in our preceding chapter. Ezekiel 47 further informs us that they will originate from beneath the temple. That requires that the temple be on high ground, the “continental divide,” as it were, between the Mediterranean and the Jordan Valley.

There is a notable lack of consensus concerning the precise layout of Jerusalem during the second temple period (of course, it’s the only city in the world where it matters), so there’s a certain amount of guesswork involved here: Benjamin’s gate was apparently on the north end of the temple mount. The Tower of Hananeel (or Hananel) was probably in that vicinity as well, slightly further

west (though some—notably Josephus—identify it with the Tower of Hippicus, which was near the midpoint jog in the city’s western wall). The “Corner Gate” was in the southwest corner of the upper city. If the “king’s winepresses” were where you’d expect them to be, near the king’s gardens at the extreme southern end of the City of David, Zack’s description of what is to be “raised up” would seem to include all of the old city.

Note as well that Zechariah says (three times) that this area will be “inhabited.” To my ears, this is confirmation of the theory that the new temple will be built at Golgotha—uphill and a quarter mile northwest of Solomon’s temple. Nobody “lives” on the temple grounds, but later we’ll see that the Millennial priests’ homes will be in a designated area  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles long and  $3\frac{1}{3}$  miles wide, with the 875-foot-square temple compound in the middle of it. So if Zack’s “raised up” area is to be “inhabited,” the temple site is going to have to be somewhere other than on the traditional temple mount.

Jeremiah concurs, and clarifies the area’s description: **“Behold, the days are coming, says Yahweh, that the city shall be built for Yahweh from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. The surveyor’s line shall again extend straight forward over the hill Gareb; then it shall turn toward Goath. And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the Brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to Yahweh. It shall not be plucked up or thrown down anymore forever.”** (Jeremiah 31:38-40) Remember what I said a couple dozen chapters ago about the cultural baggage of the scriptures getting lost in transit? These are more than just place names. They tell us something wonderful about Yahweh’s Millennial plans. We’ve already located the Tower of Hananel and the Corner Gate—the entire north-south length of the upper city. The “city built for Yahweh” will extend that far. But Garab and Goath were north of this, outside the old city walls. In fact, these were both unclean places in ancient times: Gibeat Gareb was called Leper’s Hill, and Goath, to the west of Gareb, was known as the Hill of Death (or roaring, or groaning). There were many tombs in the area. You know it by another name: Golgotha. Though outside the “city,” these areas are now said to be “holy to Yahweh,” along with another formerly unclean area: the “valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes” can be none other than the dreaded Valley of Hinnom, Gehenna, the Jews’ metaphor for hell itself, which runs south of the old city and joins the Brook of Kidron on the east. Thus the total area described is almost a mile square. These place names demonstrate that what was formerly unclean, polluted, and impure (whether places or people) can and will be made holy—set apart for Yahweh’s purposes.

It’s little wonder the Psalmist gushed, **“Great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.”** (Psalm 48:1-2)

The reason “Zion” is so often used synonymously with Jerusalem is that the old upper city was built on Mount Zion—it is directly west of Moriah, with the Tyropoeon Valley separating them. So what is on the north side of Zion? Golgotha. Surprise, surprise.

We read in the description of the great Day of Atonement earthquake (Revelation 11:13) that “a tenth of the city (i.e., Jerusalem) fell.” When we see such language, we usually think in terms of buildings falling, and that is indeed one of the possible meanings of the Greek word for “fell,” *pipto*. But its primary meaning is: “to descend from a higher place to a lower.” (Strong’s) In light of our recent discoveries, I believe we’ve stumbled onto a statistical assessment of the topographical rearrangement of Jerusalem. While the old city—specifically the area around Golgotha—is to be elevated, one tenth of the city will actually sink in elevation, making the “Mountain of God” stand out as the highest peak in the area.

Isaiah eloquently compares the future rearrangement of the topography of Zion’s hills to the rock-solid permanence of Yahweh’s love for Israel. **“For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,”** says Yahweh, who has mercy on you. **‘O you afflicted one, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones.’** For two millennia, Jews have been desperately trying to equate the “suffering Messiah” passages with Israel itself. Though Israel’s affliction saves no one, the fact remains: she is suffering. Here Yahweh promises relief and prosperity. **“All your children shall be taught by Yahweh, and great shall be the peace of your children. In righteousness you shall be established. You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you.”** (Isaiah 54:10-14) If the Jews today think living under the threat of Islamic terror is bad, they’re in for a shock—it will be far worse under the Antichrist during the second half of the Tribulation. But life under Yahshua will bring absolute freedom from fear.

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The images Ezekiel’s visionary temple presents are pictures of Yahweh’s plan for mankind. We have already seen the re-emergence of His six-plus-one pattern and the outer and inner walls that signify that man must be born both physically and spiritually to enter the presence of Yahweh. The gates are the exclusive means Yahweh has provided to reach the throne of God (there’s no climbing over the wall). The single door to the temple indicates that there is only one path to

God. And you can't enter the temple without first going to the altar, for its massive form guards the only entrance.

Once you're past the altar, however, and have entered the Holy Place (a picture of the state of being saved through the sacrifice of the blood of the perfect Lamb of God), then access to the very throne of God is provided—via the altar of incense. This incense is representative of the prayers of the saints, which are as sweet and pleasant to Yahweh as the happy sounds of our children's greetings are to us. Of course, just as the incense in the Tabernacle had to be made to a specific formula and used exclusively in the worship of Yahweh (cf. Exodus 30:34-38), only prayers in accordance with the will of Yahweh—and offered to Him—have a prayer of being answered in the affirmative. The bottom line: all these walls, gates, and altars are symbolic not of barriers to God's presence but rather of the path He in His loving wisdom has provided for us. He wants us to approach Him, but He insists that we do so His way—in holiness.

We'll discover more of Yahweh's plan as we proceed through Ezekiel's detailed description of the temple and its service. For now, let's pick up the narrative as he depicts the sacrificial altar standing immediately outside the entrance to the Holy Place. **"These are the measurements of the altar: There is a gutter all around the altar 21 inches wide and 21 inches deep, with a curb 9 inches wide around its edge. And this is the height of the altar: From the gutter the altar rises 3½ feet to a ledge that surrounds the altar; this lower ledge is 21 inches wide. From the lower ledge the altar rises 7 feet to the upper ledge; this upper ledge is also 21 inches wide. The top of the altar, the hearth, rises still 7 feet higher, with a horn rising up from each of the four corners. The top of the altar is square, measuring 21 feet by 21 feet. The upper ledge also forms a square, measuring 24½ feet on each side, with a 21-inch gutter and a 10½-inch curb all around the edge. There are steps going up the east side of the altar."** (Ezekiel 43:13-17 NLT) That's one big barbecue. The altar looms large both figuratively and literally in the doorway of the temple of God. Note that because the steps up to the altar are on the east side, one must face the temple—look Yahweh in the eye, so to speak—when approaching the altar.

At this point, Ezekiel is given instructions for the inauguration of the temple: **"Then he said to me, 'Son of man, this is what the Sovereign Yahweh says: These will be the regulations for the burning of offerings and the sprinkling of blood when the altar is built. At that time, the Levitical priests of the family of Zadok, who minister before me, are to be given a young bull for a sin offering, says the Sovereign Yahweh. You will take some of its blood and smear it on the four horns of the altar, the four corners of the upper ledge, and the curb that runs around that ledge. This will cleanse and make atonement for the altar. Then take the young bull for the sin offering and burn it at the appointed place outside the Temple area....'"** That's on the first day. Notice that the priests don't provide the offering—the people do. The temple is for their benefit and the benefit of their

children. The priests merely provide a service by presenting the offerings before Yahshua. They are the antithesis of an empowered and politicized clergy.

**“On the second day, sacrifice as a sin offering a young male goat that has no physical defects. Then cleanse and make atonement for the altar again, just as you did with the young bull. When you have finished the cleansing ceremony, offer another young bull that has no defects and a perfect ram from the flock. You are to present them to Yahweh, and the priests are to sprinkle salt on them and offer them as a burnt offering to Yahweh....”**

The use of salt in sacrificial offerings goes back to the Law of Moses. Because salt is a preservative, it bears the symbolic meaning of permanence, suggesting an unbreakable covenant. It stands in contrast to leaven, or yeast, which speaks of change—and was never allowed on the altar.

**“Every day for seven days a male goat, a young bull, and a ram from the flock will be sacrificed as a sin offering. None of these animals may have physical defects of any kind. Do this each day for seven days to cleanse and make atonement for the altar, thus setting it apart for holy use. On the eighth day, and on each day afterward, the priests will sacrifice on the altar the burnt offerings and peace offerings of the people. Then I will accept you, says the Sovereign Yahweh.”** (Ezekiel 43:18-27 NLT) For seven days (signifying completion) the ritual of dedication will continue, at which point the altar dedication will be complete. One way or another, all of these sacrifices point back to the finished work of Yahshua on the cross. The sin offering, for example, does not in itself atone for sin, but rather demonstrates the acknowledgment of the sinner that he *needs* forgiveness—and that this forgiveness is to be found in the sacrifice of Christ. Bear in mind that the earth is (as usual) populated with mortal men at this time, presumably not too far into the Millennium. They have a sin nature, so just like you and me, they still sin—and then they either repent or they don’t. This whole new sacrifice ritual is thus very much like the Levitical worship in the Old Testament—a multifaceted picture of the sacrifice of Yahshua that’s designed to teach man in unmistakable terms about his need for redemption.

But there is one important difference. Whereas the Levitical rituals were the exclusive province of the Jews (in the sense that the gentile nations were not active participants), in the Millennium the whole world will be involved in the worship of Yahweh. The Jews will be the gatekeepers, so to speak. Zechariah explains: **“Thus says Yahweh of hosts: ‘Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, “Let us continue to go and pray before Yahweh, and seek Yahweh of hosts. I myself will go also.” Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek Yahweh of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before Yahweh.’ Thus says Yahweh of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.””** (Zechariah 9:20-22) Needless to say, that’s not what happens in our world. Today the nations are repelled by the twisted caricature of

godliness that Judaism presents. It's painfully obvious that God is *not* with them—yet—for they have not yet turned to Him.

This new relationship is referred to in another of Zechariah's prophecies as well. **“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,”** says Yahweh. **‘Many nations shall be joined to Yahweh in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that Yahweh of hosts has sent Me to you. And Yahweh will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem.’** (Zechariah 2:10-12) In this remarkable passage, Yahweh as the Shekinah and Yahweh as “Son of God” are both seen side by side in the same context. The Messiah is depicted as a Man whom Yahweh has “sent” to Israel, but a Man who acts with the very power and authority of God, because He *is* God. Look closely: Yahweh speaks in *Yahshua's* voice when He says “Yahweh has sent Me.” It should come as no surprise that such a Man/King/God would attract “many nations” to Himself, and that they should earnestly desire to be His people.

So we see that although the Priests and Levites will always have their assigned roles, devout gentiles will be welcomed participants in the worship of Yahweh. **“Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to Yahweh, to serve Him, and to love the name of Yahweh, to be His servants—everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant—Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.’** Yahweh Almighty, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, **‘Yet I will gather to him others besides those who are gathered to him.’** (Isaiah 56:6-8) The “others,” of course, are the gentile nations. They will be on an equal footing with the Jews as far as being “joyful in Yahweh's house of prayer” is concerned. And lest you jump to the hasty conclusion that the Mosaic Law will be pressed into service as a basis for salvation, let me point out that “keeping from defiling the Sabbath” is no more or less than what was listed in the previous breath: to join oneself to Yahweh, to serve Him, and to love His name (Hebrew *shem*, His position, honor, authority, and character—His whole identity). Why? Because in this context the Sabbath *is* the Millennium—the whole one-thousand years. That is not to say that the myth of Sunday worship replacing Sabbath observance will be perpetuated any longer. Yahweh never abrogated the Torah. He never said *Remember the first day of the week to keep it holy*. Sunday observance (in lieu of the Sabbath) was man's idea.

We have seen how the gentile nations will keep the Feast of Tabernacles during this time. Zechariah goes on to explain how Jerusalem will open her doors to them. **“On that day even the harness bells of the horses will be inscribed with these words: SET APART AS HOLY TO YAHWEH. And the cooking pots in the Temple of Yahweh will be as sacred as the basins used beside the altar. In fact, every cooking pot in Jerusalem and**

**Judah will be set apart as holy to Yahweh Almighty. All who come to worship will be free to use any of these pots to boil their sacrifices. And on that day there will no longer be traders [literally, Canaanites] in the Temple of Yahweh Almighty.”** (Zechariah 14:20-21 NLT) Those who make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem will be totally dedicated to the true worship of Yahweh. Even the most mundane appurtenances of daily life will be considered sacred, set apart for Yahweh’s honor. The result? The whole town will become one huge party, especially during the Feast of Tabernacles.

The psalmist put it succinctly: **“Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion; and to You the vow shall be performed. O You who hear prayer, to You all flesh will come.”** (Psalm 65:1-2)

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We now return to our anchor text from Ezekiel. **“Then the man brought me back to the east gateway in the outer wall, but it was closed. And Yahweh said to me, ‘This gate must remain closed; it will never again be opened. No man will ever pass through it, for Yahweh, the God of Israel, entered here. Thus, it must always remain shut. Only the prince himself may sit inside this gateway to feast in Yahweh’s presence. But he may come and go only through the gateway’s foyer....’”** (Ezekiel 44:1-3 NLT) *What? Who? What* prince? Saladin? No—there was no temple there when he blocked the golden gate. But it’s not Yahshua, either. Get ready for another epiphany.

Remember all those hundreds of passages predicting that David will always be represented on the throne of Israel? We (okay, *I*) generally respond like Pavlov’s dog with these, automatically reacting, “Yes, that’s a Messianic prophecy: it’s talking about Yahshua.” In many cases, that’s precisely accurate. But there are other passages that more clearly point to an actual role for David and his physical descendants in the Millennial kingdom—that’s *descendants*, plural, as in somebody other than Yahshua.

As we plow through our late-Ezekiel chapters, it will become more and more obvious that the civil government of Israel will be placed under the care of mortal descendants of King David—and probably even David himself, now an immortal being, resurrected with the rest of the saints at the rapture. Some of the following passages have been explored in their larger contexts elsewhere in this volume, but we need to take a fresh look at them in the light of this new development. **“David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children’s children, forever; and My servant David shall**

**be their prince forever.**" (Ezekiel 37:24-25) At first glance, this sounds Messianic. But on closer examination, "David My servant" seems to be counted among the sheep: they *all* have one shepherd (as in, "**Yahweh is my shepherd; I shall not want.**"—Psalm 23:1).

The same distinction between David and Yahshua is hinted at here: "**They shall serve Yahweh their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.**" (Jeremiah 30:9) Since Yahshua *is* Yahweh, it seems (SF4) that "David" here is the resurrected king, not a metaphor for Christ. The same idea is seen in Hosea: "**Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek Yahweh their God and David their king. They shall fear Yahweh and His goodness in the latter days.**" (Hosea 3:5)

That's all pretty thin, you say. Okay, how about this? "**As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.**" (Jeremiah 33:22) Or perhaps, "**He is the tower of salvation to His king, and shows mercy to His anointed, to David and his descendants forevermore.**" (II Samuel 22:51) Just as Yahweh knows precisely who are Jews, and who among *them* are Levites, He knows who David's descendants are—and apparently there are a lot of them. Even though they won't know about their royal lineage during the Tribulation, God does. Describing the Day of Atonement (five days before the end) Zechariah describes David's family's leading role in Israel's national repentance and the subsequent recognition of their returning Messiah: "**I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced.**" (Zechariah 12:10) A few verses later we are given confirmation that the "house of David" are mortals—i.e., that this is not speaking of the Messiah: "**In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.**" (Zechariah 13:1) It's clear, then, that the literal, physical descendants of David will have an important part to play in Israel's future as the Millennium begins.

Jeremiah connects the restoration of David's rule (through the Messiah or otherwise) with Yahweh's preservation of the priests and Levites: "**Behold, the days are coming,' says Yahweh, 'that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah: In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David a Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.'**" So far, this is speaking of the Messiah, Yahshua. "**In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she will be called: YAHWEH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.'** For thus says Yahweh: '**David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; nor shall the priests, the Levites, lack a man to offer burnt offerings before Me, to kindle grain offerings, and to sacrifice continually....'**" Here, He might be referring to Yahshua, but He could just as easily be talking about the mortal descendants of David who will comprise the

Israeli royal family during the Millennium—after all, the priests and Levites about whom He’s speaking are definitely mortals. Why not the royal family as well?

Then, as if He hadn’t made Himself clear, Yahweh said it all again: **“And the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, saying, thus says Yahweh: ‘If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.’”** (Jeremiah 33:14-22)

The subject of where the priests and Levites will come from pops up again in one of the ubiquitous passages predicting the return of Israel to the Land. **“It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory. I will set a sign among them....”** Yes, and the sign says “Going out of business.” He’s referring to the battles of the Tribulation, in which God’s miraculous deliverance of the Jews will be the primary reason so many Gentiles see the light and refuse to follow the Antichrist. **“And those among them who escape I will send to the nations: to Tarshish and Pul and Lud, who draw the bow, and Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off who have not heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles....”** The survivors of World War III will evangelize the world, and those who survive to the end will honor the God who saved them by bringing Israel back to the Land (cf. Isaiah 18:7): **“Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to Yahweh out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem,’ says Yahweh, ‘as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of Yahweh. And I will also take some of them for priests and Levites,’ says Yahweh.”** (Isaiah 66:18-21)

In English, this sounds suspiciously like Yahweh will arbitrarily draft Jews from any old tribe to serve in Levitical roles, but I don’t think that’s the case. Ezekiel specified the literal family of Zadok as the only qualified priests, and Malachi, in a passage utilized by George Frederick Handel in his famous oratorio, *The Messiah*, says that the Levites must be purified like a precious metal before they can be of service to Yahweh “as in the days of old.” **“He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to Yahweh an offering in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to Yahweh, as in the days of old, as in former years.”** (Malachi 3:3-4) Since literal Levites served “in former years,” we have no choice but to conclude that the same will be true during the Millennium.

I don’t really want to complicate this, but one point must be clarified. The priests and Levites we’ve been referring to are mortal men, Jews who will serve in the Millennial temple. Their role is symbolic, a living metaphor for the holiness

of Yahweh. But there will be an entirely different order of priests in the world at this time as well: **“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”** (Revelation 20:6) Perhaps it would be appropriate at this point to define the word “priest” in Biblical terms. The Greek used here is *hiereus*, derived from a word that means “holy.” It means one who offers sacrifices; thus the implication is that the priest stands as an intermediary between God and man.

In the case of the Levitical priests, this is a job description, but for those in the verse at hand it means something far more personal. Those who have had a part in the “first resurrection,” believers of every age who have died or been raptured prior to the beginning of the Millennium, will, in their immortal, resurrected bodies, have unprecedented access to the throne of Yahshua. It should therefore come as no surprise that we will function as “priests of God and of Christ” during the Millennium—more mentors than intermediaries I should think, helping mortals understand the mind of God. It’s an awesome responsibility, but Yahshua will have equipped us for the task. This is what it means to “reign with Him.” We will be personally invested in the lives of the Millennial millions, teaching, guiding, and admonishing them in the love of Yahshua our King.

This is where Christ’s parables of servants and their talents—that which was entrusted to them as stewards during their mortal lives—will come to fruition. What we did with what we were given in this life, whether much or little, will be a measure of how much responsibility we’ll be given in the next. I can think of no greater privilege than being assigned the task of mentoring Millennial mortals in the ways of Yahweh. But some of us, having squandered our opportunities for service as mortals ourselves, will be given *less important* things to do. Oh, we’ll be “saved,” all right, but there might also be some chagrin—some “weeping and gnashing of teeth”—when we discover how little our Messiah feels He can trust us with in His kingdom.

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Where were we? Oh, yes. Back in Ezekiel, touring the visionary temple. We had just been informed that once the Shekinah, the Glory of Yahshua, returns to the temple through the eastern outer gate, that gate will be shut forever. It was presumably this prophecy the Muslims were trying to torpedo when Saladin sealed the eastern or “golden” gate of the temple mount in the twelfth century. Sorry, guys: wrong temple, wrong place, wrong god. The return of Yahweh’s glory to Israel will apparently take place during the Millennial temple dedication

ceremonies, described above, though we aren't specifically told. The gateway building will then be available only for the prince—the now-immortal David—and not for entrance or egress but exclusively for “feasting” before Yahshua. The north and south gates are still available for everyone to enter and leave the temple courtyard.

**“Then the man brought me through the north gateway to the front of the Temple. I looked and saw that the glory of Yahweh filled the Temple of Yahweh, and I fell to the ground with my face in the dust.”** A perfectly rational reaction. **“And Yahweh said to me, ‘Son of man, take careful notice; use your eyes and ears. Listen to everything I tell you about the regulations concerning Yahweh’s Temple. Take careful note of who may be admitted to the Temple and who is to be excluded from it.’** The holiness theme continues. **“And give these rebels, the people of Israel, this message from the Sovereign Yahweh: O people of Israel, enough of your disgusting sins! You have brought uncircumcised foreigners into My sanctuary—people who have no heart for God. In this way, you profaned My Temple even as you offered Me My food, the fat and blood of sacrifices. Thus, in addition to all your other disgusting sins, you have broken My covenant. You have not kept the laws I gave you concerning these sacred rituals, for you have hired foreigners to take charge of My sanctuary....”** This is a pointed rebuke to Ezekiel’s immediate audience: by indulging in their idolatries, they had “hired” the Babylonians to come in and trash the temple. The lesson should ring loud and true for us today. With our national idolatries we are in effect “hiring” the new Babylonians—among them, the house of Islam—to “take charge.” 9/11 was only the first salvo. Wake up and repent, America.

**“So this is what the Sovereign Yahweh says: No foreigners, including those who live among the people of Israel, will enter My sanctuary if they have not been circumcised and do not love Yahweh....”** But conversely, foreigners—gentiles—who meet these conditions are welcome, in stark contrast to the strict limits imposed on temple access in times past (cf. Acts 21:28). In other words, both inward and outward holiness is required if the Millennial mortals wish to approach the throne of Yahshua. Holiness is mandatory for Jews and gentiles alike. “Being circumcised” and “loving Yahweh” are equated here, bringing up an important point. “Circumcision” in this context is not the physical rite—the removal of the foreskin of a male’s penis on the eighth day of life, as required in the Torah. Rather, it is what the rite *symbolizes*: the complete, permanent, and irreversible separation of ourselves from our sin in a process involving blood and pain—a process that, like everything else in the Torah, was fulfilled in Christ.

Remember what we discussed a while back about believers losing their potential rewards and positions of responsibility by being unwilling to use their “talents” in service to God? The plight of these “wicked and lazy” servants is echoed in the millennial division of labor in the temple: **“And the men of the tribe of**

Levi who abandoned Me when Israel strayed away from Me to worship idols must bear the consequences of their unfaithfulness. They may still be Temple guards and gatemen, and they may still slaughter the animals brought for burnt offerings and be present to help the people. But they encouraged My people to worship other gods, causing Israel to fall into deep sin. So I have raised My hand and taken an oath that they must bear the consequences for their sins, says the Sovereign Yahweh. They may not approach Me to minister as priests. They may not touch any of My holy things or the holy offerings, for they must bear the shame of all the sins they have committed. They are to serve as the Temple caretakers and are relegated to doing maintenance work and helping the people in a general way....” Before the time of King Hezekiah (715-686 B.C), the spiritual state of Israel had sunk to a new low. But a revival under his reign had necessitated pressing Levites into service until priests (by law, a specific family from within that same tribe) in sufficient numbers could “sanctify themselves.” (cf. II Chronicles 29:34) Now, because of their subsequent idolatry, the Levite clans (most of them) are being informed that they will no longer be considered eligible for such significant service—but they *will* get to be the janitors and doormen in the Millennial temple.

On the flip side of this coin is the one family who proved themselves consistently faithful. **“However, the Levitical priests of the family of Zadok continued to minister faithfully in the Temple when Israel abandoned Me for idols. These men will serve as My ministers. They will stand in my presence and offer the fat and blood of the sacrifices, says the Sovereign Yahweh. They are the ones who will enter My sanctuary and approach My table to serve Me. They are the ones who will fulfill all My requirements.”** (Ezekiel 44:4-16 NLT) Zadok was a priest in David’s time, a descendant of Eleazar (the third son and spiritual heir of Aaron, the original high priest). Zadok supported David’s (and Yahweh’s) choice of Solomon as heir, and his descendants served as Israel’s chief priests both before and after the Babylonian captivity—until they were forcibly removed from office in 171 B.C. by none other than Antiochus IV Epiphanes. (He, if you’ll recall, was the Seleucid King who slaughtered a sow on the altar of the second temple—making himself a prophetic prototype for the Antichrist.) The Zadokites, then, were the good guys. Of all the priestly sub-families, they alone never strayed from the true worship of Yahweh. Here we see them being rewarded.

Once again, we see that God never forgets (presumably because all time is present to Him). The line of Zadok—without being named as such—was in view when Yahweh told Moses what would happen to Israel’s priesthood: **“Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting**

**priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.”** (Numbers 25:11-13)

Back in Ezekiel’s prophecy, we are given more information about the priests’ duties. **“When they enter the gateway to the inner courtyard, they must wear only linen clothing** [symbolic, as usual, of imputed righteousness]. **They must wear no wool while on duty in the inner courtyard or in the Temple itself. They must wear linen turbans and linen undergarments. They must not wear anything that would cause them to perspire.”** I believe the idea is that our best works (symbolized by perspiration) are insufficient to gain us favor with God. Only Yahweh can bring us to Yahweh. **“When they return to the outer courtyard where the people are, they must take off the clothes they wear while ministering to Me. They must leave them in the sacred rooms and put on other clothes so they do not harm the people by transmitting holiness to them through this clothing....”** This may seem odd, but the underlying truth (I think) is that we can’t be holy for other people, and they can’t be holy for us. Our own sin condemns us, and our own choice to follow Yahshua enables Him to rescue us. Sitting in a pew at church won’t make you alive any more than walking through a graveyard will make you dead.

**“They must neither let their hair grow too long nor shave it off completely. Instead, they must trim it regularly. The priests must never drink wine before entering the inner courtyard. They may choose their wives only from among the virgins of Israel or the widows of the priests. They may not marry other widows or divorced women. They will teach My people the difference between what is holy and what is common, what is ceremonially clean and unclean....”** Here we see some examples of practical manifestations of personal holiness, things we brush off at our own peril. The priests are to avoid extremes of grooming—they are to make an effort to look “normal” within their society. The point is that they are not to draw attention to themselves, but only to God. By doing these things, they will be “teaching” the people who visit the temple, by example, what it means to be holy. Yahweh is not telling them to be teetotalers (wine is a common scriptural metaphor for the enjoyment of God’s blessings), but don’t even *think* about coming to work tipsy. We are to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and nothing else. And they (like we) are to choose like-minded mates, godly spouses (or is that “spice?”) who will support us in our desire to be consecrated to Yahweh.

**“They will serve as judges to resolve any disagreements among my people. Their decisions must be based on My regulations....”** The Torah is the only code of “law” in existence that was handed down by God Himself. Its “practical” component (as contrasted with its ritual/symbolic elements) is the most fair-minded, robust, and dare I say, straightforward corpus of law imaginable. And it will be *the* law during the Millennium—administered not by civil jurists, but by the priests of Yahweh.

Most of the Torah, however, is symbolic and metaphorical—fulfilled in its entirety by the now-reigning Messiah, Yahshua the King. These Instructions will be continued and perpetuated throughout the Millennium, for they reveal as memorial (as they once did as prophecy) the plan of Yahweh for the redemption of mankind. So we read, **“And the priests themselves must obey My instructions and laws at all the sacred festivals, and they will see to it that the Sabbath is set apart as a holy day....”** It may come as a shock to many Christians, but Yahweh never shifted his “holy day” from the Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday. That was a man-made tradition, whatever the rationale. To our shame, Sunday worship was codified into “Christian” practice at the Council of Laodicea in 336 (some date it in 364) *not* to honor Christ’s resurrection, but as an anti-Semitic offensive—or worse, a thinly veiled attempt to blend Mithraic sun worship with Christian practice. The Council’s Canon 29 stated, “Christians must not Judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, honoring rather the Lord’s Day by resting, if possible, as Christians. However, if any shall be found Judaizing, let them be shut out from Christ.” Once again, we find our precious traditions diametrically opposed to the revealed word of Yahweh. God forgive us.

Ezekiel continues: **“A priest must never defile himself by being in the presence of a dead person unless it is his father, mother, child, brother, or unmarried sister. In such cases it is permitted. But such a priest can only return to his Temple duties after being ritually cleansed and then waiting for seven days. The first day he returns to work and enters the inner courtyard and the sanctuary, he must offer a sin offering for himself,” says the Sovereign Yahweh....**” This ends the debate as to whether people will die during the Millennium. They will, though the normal lifespan is greatly increased. This whole discussion builds upon what is already written in the Torah (in this case, Numbers 19). Yahshua (in Matthew 5:17) said He wasn’t doing away with the Law of Moses, only fulfilling it. The Zadokite priests will use the Torah as their guidebook for living and governance, not because it saves anyone from their sins, but because it points the way toward the One who *does*: King Yahshua. These “rules” are for *our* good—they don’t do a thing for Yahweh. In the case of priests, they are to offer a consistent picture of the holiness of Yahweh; the whole world is watching them.

**“As to property, the priests will not have any, for I alone am their inheritance. Their food will come from the gifts and sacrifices brought to the Temple by the people—the grain offerings, the sin offerings, and the guilt offerings. Whatever anyone sets apart for Yahweh will belong to the priests. The first of the ripe fruits and all the gifts brought to Yahweh will go to the priests. The first samples of each grain harvest and the first of your flour must also be given to the priests so Yahweh will bless your homes. The priests may never eat meat from any bird or animal that dies a natural death or that dies after being attacked by another animal.”** (Ezekiel 44:17-31 NLT) Again, these precepts are just as they were laid out in the Torah. Then as now (as always), Yahweh sees our gifts

supporting people who are working on His behalf as gifts to Him—personally. He doesn't *need* anything from us, but look at it this way: if Rembrandt's preschooler drew a picture for him, he'd proudly stick it up on the fridge. It's not what we do for God, but why we do it.

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There's more to the Promised Land than the temple, of course. Isaiah predicts that Israel's Millennial borders will encompass more land than they did previously: **"You have increased the nation, O Yahweh; You have increased the nation. You are glorified; You have expanded all the borders of the land."** (Isaiah 26:15) This begs the question, "expanded the borders from *what?*" The safe answer is, "from what they were immediately before He expanded them," i.e., whatever the Antichrist's vaunted peace treaty whittled them down to—my guess is the painfully thin U.N. Resolution #242 borders, or perhaps the even more anorexic Resolution #181 lines. The more provocative answer is, "the Israel of Isaiah's day." Prior to the Assyrian invasion of the north, this still stretched "from Dan to Beersheba," the lite version of the Numbers 34 description (which is in turn a low-calorie variation on the borders Yahweh originally described to Abraham. Yahweh is reiterating here that Israel will indeed own the whole Land of promise, though as we shall see, not all of it will be distributed among the twelve tribes.

Thus we move into the "urban planning" phase of Ezekiel's prophecy. **"When you divide the land among the tribes of Israel, you must set aside a section of it for Yahweh as his holy portion. This piece of land will be  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles long [almost  $9\frac{1}{2}$  miles long if you're using a 24-inch cubit] and  $6\frac{2}{3}$  miles wide. The entire area will be holy ground. A section of this land, measuring 875 feet by 875 feet, will be set aside for the Temple...."** The temple compound is within a much larger district—over 55 square miles dedicated to Yahweh. The KJV's description of the temple area supplies the word "reeds" here, but the word is missing in the Hebrew text. "Reeds" would make the space six times as large, but we've already verified this dimension in earlier passages. And the context (verse 2) verifies that cubits (Hebrew: *'ammah*) are the unit of measure in view. **"An additional strip of land  $87\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide is to be left empty all around it...."** If nothing else, this extra 50-cubit perimeter proves that the new temple won't be placed up on the old temple mount. There's not enough room for it up there.

Yahweh, of course, has no need or desire for real estate—He owns the whole universe, after all. So it should come as no surprise that His intention is to divide up the area He's set aside for Himself into neighborhoods for the priests and

Levites, whom you'll recall have no inheritance in Israel other than Yahweh Himself. **"Within the larger sacred area, measure out a portion of land  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles long and  $3\frac{1}{3}$  miles wide. Within it the sanctuary of the Most Holy Place will be located. This area will be a holy land, set aside for the priests who minister to Yahweh in the sanctuary. They will use it for their homes, and my Temple will be located within it. The strip of sacred land next to it, also  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles long and  $3\frac{1}{3}$  miles wide, will be a living area for the Levites who work at the Temple. It will be their possession and a place for their towns...."** Yahweh's land will be cut into two strips, length-wise. The temple compound will be within the priests' half, and Leviteville will be right next door.

**"Adjacent to the larger sacred area will be a section of land  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles long and  $1\frac{2}{3}$  miles wide. This will be set aside to be a city where anyone in Israel can come and live."** (Ezekiel: 45:1-6 NLT) If you're keeping score, you will have calculated that the entire area being discussed is a perfect square,  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles on each side. The priests' quarter will occupy the center section (with the temple compound in the center of the entire square). The strip open to everyone will be next to it, as will be the Levites' territory, though which strip is north of it and which is south is not clear. This 70 square mile area, in case you missed it, is the Millennial Jerusalem, of which only  $2\frac{1}{4}$  square miles is set aside for the living areas of non-Levites. Something tells me this little patch will quickly become the most expensive real estate on earth—the domain of high-rises and embassies.

In the interests of maintaining focus on the subject at hand, let's skip down to the middle of the 47<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ezekiel, where the discussion of the geography of Israel continues. **"This is what the Sovereign Yahweh says: 'Follow these instructions for dividing the land for the twelve tribes of Israel: The tribe of Joseph will be given two shares of land. Otherwise each tribe will receive an equal share. I swore that I would give this land to your ancestors, and it will now come to you as your inheritance...."** God does not forget those who serve Him. This is a reference to Genesis 48, where the faithful Joseph's two sons were "adopted" by his father Israel—effectively giving Joseph two tribes. In the conquest of Canaan, Levi—the tribe of Moses and Aaron—was given no territorial inheritance (they received Yahweh Himself, and a scattered collection of towns). So the land was still split up twelve ways, with Ephraim and Manasseh receiving Joseph's double portion. This arrangement still holds true in the Millennium.

The area being divided between these twelve tribes is now described: **"The northern border will run from the Mediterranean toward Hethlon, then on through Lebohamath [or "Entrance to Hamath," not to be confused with Hamath itself, which is some fifty miles north] to Zedad; then it will run to Berothah and Sibraim, which are on the border between Damascus and Hamath, and finally to Hazer-hatticon, on the border of Hauran. So the northern border will run from the Mediterranean to Hazar-enan, on the border between Hamath to the north and Damascus to the south."** Hamath and

Damascus were not only city names, but also lent their names to entire districts—the border between them was located at approximately 34 degrees north latitude. **“The eastern border starts at a point between Hauran and Damascus and runs southward along the Jordan River between Israel and Gilead, past the Dead Sea and as far south as Tamar. This will be the eastern border. The southern border will go west from Tamar to the waters of Meribah at Kadesh and then follow the course of the brook of Egypt to the Mediterranean. This will be the southern border. On the west side the Mediterranean itself will be your border from the southern border to the point where the northern border begins, opposite Lebo-hamath.”** (Ezekiel 47:13-21 NLT)

Although some of the place names are different, this area is virtually identical to that described in Numbers 34 (which we discussed at length in chapter 6). It includes all of present-day Israel, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip (but minus the southern triangle of desert extending from the Negev to the Gulf of Aqaba), plus almost all of Lebanon with a few miles of Syrian territory to the west thrown in. This, I’d say, is good news and bad news. It’s good news in that even 3,000-plus years of Jewish rebellion couldn’t persuade Yahweh to renege on His territorial promises to Israel. The bad news is that the tribal lands are divided up over a much smaller area than that promised to the patriarchs. God had said to Abram: **“To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt [the Wadi el-Arish] to the great river, the River Euphrates,”** (Genesis 15:18) and to Moses, **“I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River.”** (Exodus 23:31) As we have seen, Israel has controlled all of this territory at one time or another—mostly under David and Solomon. In fact, my guess (SF3) is that they will control every square inch of it again during the Millennium. But the southernmost and northernmost portions will not be specifically distributed among the twelve tribes. The lesson is: there is a difference between influence and ownership. In this case, that difference was quantified by the unbelief of Israel during the Exodus.

Ready for another epiphany? During the Millennium, being a physical descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be no more effective in identifying you as “an Israeli” than merely showing your devotion to the Land: **“Divide the land within these boundaries among the tribes of Israel. Distribute the land as an inheritance for yourselves and for the foreigners who have joined you and are raising their families among you. They will be just like native-born Israelites to you, and they will receive an inheritance among the tribes. All these immigrants are to be given land within the territory of the tribe with whom they now live. I, the Sovereign Yahweh, have spoken!”** (Ezekiel 47:21-23 NLT) There is a precedent for this in the person of Caleb—technically from gentile Kenizzite (Edomite) stock but joined to the tribe of Judah (cf. Joshua 14:6) The point seems to be, If you love Yahweh, you’ll naturally love what He loves.

The division of territory between the twelve tribes looks only vaguely like it did when Joshua led the Israelite armies into the Land for the first time. Ezekiel saw it this way: **“Here is the list of the tribes of Israel and the territory each is to receive. The territory of Dan is in the extreme north. Its boundary line follows the Hethlon road to Lebo-hamath and then runs on to Hazar-enan on the border of Damascus, with Hamath to the north. Dan’s territory extends all the way across the land of Israel from east to west....”** Dan, if you’ll recall, thought its assigned location under Joshua (on the northern edge of Philistine territory) was too tough, so they abandoned their allocated plot and moved to where things looked easier, way up north. There they promptly forgot all about God’s promises to fight for them and took up idol worship in a big way. What did it cost them? As we’ve seen, Dan will be the only tribe not represented among the 144,000 Jewish witnesses during the tribulation. But there’s more. Yes, Dan is given a slice of the new Israel—but in the boonies. What did they give up for it? Only downtown Tel Aviv—destined to become a hunk of the Millennium’s most coveted real estate. I guess it doesn’t pay to doubt Yahweh.

The next few tribes follow roughly the same pattern of distribution they had under Joshua—the tribes that were farther north are still there. **“Asher’s territory lies south of Dan’s and also extends from east to west. Naphtali’s land lies south of Asher’s, also extending from east to west. Then comes Manasseh south of Naphtali, and its territory also extends from east to west. South of Manasseh is Ephraim, and then Reuben, and then Judah, all of whose boundaries extend from east to west....”** Each tribe gets a horizontal slice running all the way across the country. Considering the fact that north of the Sea of Galilee, the border swerves east to encompass many miles of today’s Syria, the tribes in the north (Dan, Asher, and Naphtali) come out fine in the square miles department. (I’m assuming, with the majority of commentators, that the distance will be divided evenly from north to south, though we aren’t specifically told.) The “waist,” the thinnest portion of the land, extends from the Sea of Galilee south to Jerusalem’s latitude near the northern tip of the Dead Sea.

Since we’ve seen over and over again how Yahweh doesn’t ever forget anything, I was curious as to the disposition of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh. Those two and a half tribes, if you’ll recall, turned up their noses at an inheritance within the Land, opting to settle in lands east of the Jordan River Valley. Manasseh didn’t get hit too badly, falling just north of the Sea of Galilee, taking minimal advantage of the “Syrian bulge.” (Ephraim just to their south, is gifted with Galilee, the jewel of the Levant.) Ungrateful Reuben is next, falling heir to the skinniest portion there is. And Gad, the last of the transjordanian ingrates? They inherit the caboose, the far southern boondocks—the hottest, driest, most inhospitable section of the twelve (although under the Millennial

reign of Yahshua, even this will bloom like the rose). I think it's becoming clear: questioning Yahweh's plan for our lives can cost us.

Judah is nearly as thin as Reuben, but they'll inherit Tel Aviv—a prize well worth the trade-off. Judah under Joshua was farther south, taking up much of the Land south of Jerusalem. They've traded quantity for quality in the Millennium. Since Judah is the tribe of the King, it makes sense that their portion is contiguous with the land set aside for the Prince, the priests and Levites, Jerusalem, and the temple. Benjamin, as we shall see, shares this honor on the south. This, if you'll recall, was the only tribe that formally stuck with Judah when the nation split apart after Solomon's reign.

**“South of Judah is the land set aside for a special purpose. It will be  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles wide and will extend as far east and west as the tribal territories, with the Temple at the center. The area set aside for Yahweh's Temple will be  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles long and  $6\frac{2}{3}$  miles wide. For the priests there will be a strip of land measuring  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles long by  $3\frac{1}{3}$  miles wide, with Yahweh's Temple at the center. This area is set aside for the ordained priests, the descendants of Zadok who obeyed me and did not go astray when the people of Israel and the rest of the Levites did. It will be their special portion when the land is distributed, the most sacred land of all. Next to the priests' territory will lie the land where the other Levites will live. The land allotted to the Levites will be the same size and shape as that belonging to the priests— $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles long and  $3\frac{1}{3}$  miles wide. Together these portions of land will measure  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles long by  $6\frac{2}{3}$  miles wide. None of this special land will ever be sold or traded or used by others, for it belongs to Yahweh; it is set apart as holy....”** The bulk of the land will be under Jubilee rules, that is, it may be “sold,” (in reality leased) to others, with the understanding that everything reverts back to its original ownership every fifty years. But the holy zone, this block  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles square, may never be sold, leased, or used for any purpose other than that which Yahweh specified. These uses are discussed next:

**“An additional strip of land  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles long by  $1\frac{2}{3}$  miles wide, south of the sacred Temple area, will be allotted for public use—homes, pasturelands, and common lands, with a city at the center. The city will measure  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles on each side. Open lands will surround the city for 150 yards in every direction. Outside the city there will be a farming area that stretches  $3\frac{1}{3}$  miles to the east and  $3\frac{1}{3}$  miles to the west along the border of the sacred area. This farmland will produce food for the people working in the city. Those who come from the various tribes to work in the city may farm it. This entire area—including the sacred lands and the city—is a square that measures  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles on each side.”** (Ezekiel 48:1-20 NLT) Though it is destined to become the most significant  $2\frac{1}{4}$  square mile city on earth, Yahweh has nevertheless ensured that the “business district” will maintain a rural feel, flanked on two sides by open farmland and surrounded by a broad greenbelt. It is worth noting that today the hills of Judea are a poor candidate for such a vegetable garden. They're rocky, mountainous, and bone dry. But none of

these things are an obstacle to the Messiah, whose remake of this place from the ground up will turn it once again into the land of milk and honey.

It may seem odd to us, but downtown NeoJerusalem will be a walled city, not for protection but for symbolism. **“These will be the exits to the city: On the north wall, which is 1½ miles long, there will be three gates, each one named after a tribe of Israel. The first will be named for Reuben, the second for Judah, and the third for Levi. On the east wall, also 1½ miles long, the gates will be named for Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan. The south wall, also 1½ miles long, will have gates named for Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun. And on the west wall, also 1½ miles long, the gates will be named for Gad, Asher, and Naphtali. The distance around the entire city will be six miles. And from that day the name of the city will be ‘Yahweh Is There.’”** (Ezekiel 48:30-35 NLT) This time, each of the twelve actual tribes is represented (no missing Levi or doubled Joseph). The heritage of Israel is pictured as the doorway to Yahshua’s city. If nothing else, this is a scathing rebuke of Christians who harbor anti-Semitic sentiments (Martin Luther comes to mind as a prominent example). If Yahweh is willing to honor Israel in this way, so should we.

Zechariah saw a vision reminiscent of Ezekiel’s—with an angelic surveyor measuring the future Jerusalem—that seems at first to contradict it. **“I raised my eyes and looked, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand. So I said, ‘Where are you going?’ And he said to me, ‘To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length.’ And there was the angel who talked with me, going out; and another angel was coming out to meet him, who said to him, ‘Run, speak to this young man, saying: ‘Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. ‘For I,’ says Yahweh, ‘will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.’”**” (Zechariah 2:1-5) Ezekiel just got through telling us that Jerusalem’s “downtown” will have precise dimensions—about a mile and a half square—and will have a wall around it. But this young man in Zack’s vision is being told that the “city” will be too big to wall in or even to measure—don’t even bother trying. Nor will there be any need for a defensive wall, for Yahweh is there to protect her. I think Zechariah is telling us that greater Jerusalem will consist not only of the “downtown” area, and will not even be restricted to the 8<sup>1/3</sup>-mile-square holy zone, but will actually spill out into suburbs in Judah’s territory to the north and Benjamin’s to the south—a sprawling, glorious megalopolis, the most significant city on earth.

Back to Ezekiel. Having located the northern tribes and the holy zone, we can now locate the southern tribes. **“These are the territories allotted to the rest of the tribes. Benjamin’s territory lies just south of the prince’s lands [in the same latitude as the holy zone, something we skipped over but to which we’ll return shortly], and it extends across the entire land of Israel from east to west. South of Benjamin’s territory lies**

that of Simeon, also extending across the land from east to west. Next is the territory of Issachar with the same eastern and western boundaries. Then comes the territory of Zebulun, which also extends across the land from east to west. The territory of Gad is just south of Zebulun with the same borders to the east and west. The southern border of Gad runs from Tamar to the waters of Meribah at Kadesh and then follows the brook of Egypt to the Mediterranean. These are the allotments that will be set aside for each tribe's inheritance, says the Sovereign Yahweh." (Ezekiel 48:23-29 NLT) Simeon, like Benjamin, is roughly where they were under Joshua. Zebulun and Issachar, however, have moved many miles south, from the hills west of the Sea of Galilee to the Negev—the arid land southwest of the Dead Sea. I can only presume that this territory will be somewhat less barren than it is now. A compensating factor is that the Land widens out at this point, making Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun winners in the square miles department. Gad, as we have seen, is the last with the least, being one of the two and a half tribes that passed on an inheritance within Canaan under Joshua. It bears repeating: God doesn't forget.

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Earlier, we were introduced to the concept of a civil administrator ruling over Israel—not the Messiah, but someone who governs under Him. This “prince” was even identified: **“My servant David shall be their prince forever.”** (Ezekiel 37:25) The fact that David has been dead for three thousand years shouldn't be viewed as an obstacle. Did not Yahshua promise His disciples that they would rule over the twelve tribes of Israel? Did not John reveal that those who have a part in the first resurrection will **“reign with Him a thousand years”**? (Revelation 20:6) Amazingly, it is *us* to whom the prophet referred when he said, **“I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,”** says Yahweh.” (Jeremiah 23:4) Our physical deaths are not a problem for God. Everyone listed above will be given an immortal body, and in that body they (we!) will assist King Yahshua in the administration of earth. The very thought makes me blush, but David, having been a King already, is presumably better prepared for this than I am.

The prince, then, is the resurrected David—a man after God's own heart. I have a feeling he will function less like an elected president or prime minister than as the patriarch of a royal family. As we shall see, his physical descendants will also play a role in the Millennial administration of Israel. But first, Ezekiel describes the estates of the Israeli royal family: **“Two special sections of land will be set apart for the prince. One section will share a border with the east side of the sacred lands and city [the 8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> mile square], and the second section will share a border on the**

west side. Then the far eastern and western borders of the prince's lands will line up with the eastern and western boundaries of the tribal areas. These sections of land will be the prince's allotment." (Ezekiel 45:7-8 NLT) The prophet clarifies the description a few chapters later: "The areas that remain, to the east and to the west of the sacred lands and the city, will belong to the prince. Each of these areas will be  $8\frac{1}{3}$  miles wide, extending in opposite directions to the eastern and western borders of Israel. So the prince's land will include everything between the territories allotted to Judah and Benjamin, except for the areas set aside for the sacred lands and the city." (Ezekiel 48:21-22 NLT). In the previous chapter, we saw how there will be two rivers flowing from the temple, one toward the east and one toward the west (cf. Zechariah 14:8-9, Ezekiel 47:1-12). Both the eastward and westward-flowing rivers would traverse the prince's lands on their way to the sea. That fact alone will make this area prime property indeed.

Ezekiel used the prophesied integrity of the Millennial princes (plural this time—the mortal descendants of David) as a scourge to chastise the princes of his day for their less than exemplary behavior. "My princes will no longer oppress and rob my people [*like you do*, is the implication]; they will assign the rest of the land to the people, giving an allotment to each tribe. For this is what the Sovereign Yahweh says: Enough, you princes of Israel! Stop all your violence and oppression and do what is just and right. Quit robbing and cheating My people out of their land! Stop expelling them from their homes! You must use only honest weights and scales." (Ezekiel 45:8-10 NLT) He then goes on to describe the units of measure and the standards of exchange that will be in use. Note that these Millennial princes will be in charge of distributing the Land among the Jewish tribes—and presumably to individuals and families within those tribes as well, since the basic tribal land grants have already been worked out. Honesty, needless to say, will be considered the chief of virtues in this endeavor.

Skipping ahead a bit, we find the thought continued: "This is what the Sovereign Yahweh says: If the prince [i.e., David] gives a gift of land to one of his sons [mortal descendants], it will belong to him and his descendants forever. But if he gives a gift of land to one of his servants, the servant may keep it only until the Year of Jubilee, which comes every fiftieth year. At that time the servant will be set free, and the land will return to the prince. Only the gifts given to the prince's sons will be permanent. And the prince may never take anyone's property by force. If he gives property to his sons, it must be from his own land, for I do not want any of My people unjustly evicted from their property." (Ezekiel 46:16-18 NLT) The reason the prince—the resurrected David—is given so much land is that he will be dividing it among his mortal descendants, the royal family of Israel. Notice that the prince's lands border the territory of his tribe, Judah, on the north. There will be twenty Jubilees during the Millennium—one every fifty years—in which lands that have been "leased" to others will revert to their

original God-appointed “owners” (though the real owner is Yahweh Himself). Thus the tribal zones will remain intact throughout the Millennium.

The interaction between mortals and immortals we see here is perhaps a clue as to the type of relationship these two groups, or “races,” will share. I envision the immortals being viewed as mentors, elder statesmen, honored patriarchs and matriarchs, and respected priestly judges, by the rapidly expanding mortal populations of the Millennium. The two groups will mix freely, working together to rebuild the world. But in our resurrected bodies, the immortals will have abilities and characteristics far beyond those of our mortal brothers—a preview of what awaits them in eternity if only they’ll follow Yahweh as we did.

Will Prince David collect taxes? Yes, but they’re not your usual Middle Eastern potentate sort of thing; they won’t be spent on lavish palaces or the upkeep of his harem. Rather, they’re so he might provide offerings in the temple on behalf of the people. **“This is the tax you must give to the prince: one bushel of wheat or barley for every sixty you harvest, one percent of your olive oil, and one sheep for every two hundred in your flocks in Israel. These will be the grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings that will make atonement for the people who bring them, says the Sovereign Yahweh. All the people of Israel must join the prince in bringing their offerings. The prince will be required to provide offerings that are given at the religious festivals, the new moon celebrations [apparently, we’re ditching the Gregorian calendar and going back to the lunar system—months starting at the new moon, making them about 29.5 days long, with an intercalary month added seven years out of every nineteen to keep the seasons straight], the Sabbath days, and all other similar occasions. He will provide the sin offerings, burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings, and peace offerings to make reconciliation for the people of Israel....”** The examples given are keyed to an agrarian society, of course, but I have no reason to doubt there will be an industrial equivalent when the time comes. As taxes go, these could hardly be called oppressive. They average about one percent of the increase, and they’re tied directly to *past* blessings on the part of Yahweh. In marked contrast to our taxation system in America and elsewhere, this is not a graduated income tax designed to redistribute wealth, taking from those who are productive or fortunate and giving it to those who are less so. It is, rather, a systematic reminder of God’s grace and sacrifice for us—a way to say thank You. Apparently the prince administers the offerings for the nation as a whole, while individuals still bring offerings for their own personal sins or thanksgiving.

The feasts of Yahweh, so significant in the unfolding of God’s plan for the redemption of mankind, will be celebrated with new understanding—and, I dare say, gratitude—in the Millennial temple. **“This is what the Sovereign Yahweh says: In early spring, on the first day of each new year, sacrifice a young bull with no physical defects to purify the Temple. The priest will take some of the blood of this sin offering and**

**put it on the doorposts of the Temple, the four corners of the upper ledge on the altar, and the gateposts at the entrance to the inner courtyard. Do this also on the seventh day of the new year for anyone who has sinned through error or ignorance. In that way, you will make atonement for the Temple.**" (Ezekiel 45:13-20 NLT) This, if I'm not mistaken, is the only Biblical mention of a celebration of "New Year's Day," the *real* Rosh Hashanah, a significant day, though not one of the seven prophetic convocations, or "Feasts of Yahweh." (The first actual holy convocation is Passover, about two weeks after this.) On the first day of Nisan each year, the blood will be applied to the portals that lead to Yahweh's inner chamber. The lesson is obvious: one cannot gain access to God without the shedding of blood, the sacrificial atonement for sin. The blood of the bull, however, atones for nothing in itself, but points back to the historical reality of Yahshua's sacrifice.

This rite on the first day of Nisan was not a part of the Levitical law. It's significant, however, that Yahweh instructed that **"you will make atonement for the Temple."** Why? It's a very special place, to be sure, but just a building nevertheless. Remember though, we were specifically told that everything about the temple environs demonstrated the holiness of Yahweh. This is no exception. The temple needs atonement because it's a metaphor for our mortal bodies. As Paul's rhetorical questions explained: **"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?... Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"** (I Corinthians 3:16, 6:19) The Holy Spirit of God lives within us—and will live within the believing mortals of the Millennium as well. Thus the annual atonement of the temple is indicative of our constant need to dedicate our bodies as a living sacrifice to Yahweh—that is, someone set apart for His purposes.

**"On the fourteenth day of the new year, you must celebrate the Passover. This festival will last for seven days."** All three spring feasts are in view here, for the seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread, including both Passover and Firstfruits, was often simply referred to as "Passover." **"Only bread without yeast may be eaten during that time."** Yeast or "leaven," you remember, is a picture of sin. **"On the day of Passover the prince will provide a young bull as a sin offering for himself and the people of Israel. On each of the seven days of the feast he will prepare a burnt offering to Yahweh. This daily offering will consist of seven young bulls and seven rams without any defects. A male goat will also be given each day for a sin offering. The prince will provide a half bushel of flour as a grain offering and a gallon of olive oil with each young bull and ram...."** The original Mosaic instructions for the daily Passover sacrifices had specified one ram and seven lambs—changed here to seven bulls and seven rams. The emphasis, in the light of Christ's historical accomplishment, is upon completion, perfection: "It is finished." More specifically, the singular ram of Moses' time was predictive of the Messiah's unique sacrifice. Since this is now a *fait accompli*, seven rams now commemorate it.

Bulls were the sacred sacrificial animal of choice for virtually every ancient culture; thus I perceive that they are a symbol in God's economy of falsehood and apostasy, of man's ideals and endeavors being substituted for Yahweh's reality. Case in point: Aaron's golden calf debacle. Cattle symbolized several things: in agrarian societies, cattle represented temporal wealth; the more cattle you owned, the wealthier you were. Indeed, a "fattened calf" was the symbol for luxurious living—killing a fattened calf in order to entertain a guest was considered a mark of great honor. But cattle or oxen were also beasts of burden—a metaphor for doing work. There is a fine line between service and servitude, between working in grateful response to Yahshua's grace and working in order to obtain it. Every religion in the world focuses on work as a means to achieve "heaven," whatever they conceive that to be. But our works are as pointless in establishing a relationship with Yahweh as they would be in any family. A child can't earn his way into the family—he must be invited into it, either by physical birth or by adoption—accepting the invitation. Thus the bull represents the wrong way to approach God—you can't buy or work your way to Him. It's an insult to Him to even try. The sacrifice of seven bulls is thus an indication that this false portal to Yahweh has been completely removed from Israel.

**"During the seven days of the Festival of Shelters, which occurs every year in early autumn, the prince will provide these same sacrifices for the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the grain offering, along with the required olive oil."** (Ezekiel 45:21-25 NLT)

Neither the Feast of Weeks nor the other two fall festivals, the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement, are specifically mentioned. Perhaps this is because at this point in time these three convocations have no future fulfillment—they are strictly memorial. But Passover and Tabernacles—symbolizing God's grace and His abiding with men—are both still vitally relevant to the Millennial mortals. Here again we see different offerings than those required under the Mosaic Law—they're the same as for the new spring feast. All these little differences demonstrate conclusively that Ezekiel's temple vision was not meant to simply restate Levitical ritual for the benefit of the apostate Jews of his day, but is designed to reflect the finished work of Yahshua for a generation yet to come. And just because the Festivals of Weeks, Trumpets, and Atonement haven't been singled out in Ezekiel, we can't automatically conclude that they will be dropped. The Mosaic Law specifically states concerning the Feast of Weeks, for instance, that **"it shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations."** (Leviticus 23:21) Perhaps it isn't mentioned because nothing at all was changed.

Is it just me, or is the incredible detail of Yahweh's revealed plan, the way this big jigsaw puzzle is all coming together, giving you goose bumps too? Everything fits. Even if the picture is crystal clear in some spots and slightly out of focus in others, it's because He wants us to concentrate on one visual plane. It's like what artists call aerial perspective: the background—the parts of the picture that aren't

the main subject—are not as sharp, not as brightly colored. They’re important supporting information, but they aren’t the point. Yahweh’s “subject” is His love, His sacrifice, and His provision for us. Everything else is “purple mountains’ majesty.”

All this minutiae is here for a reason. It’s not to satisfy our curiosity about the future, but to teach us how much Yahweh loves us. So Ezekiel continues dishing out the details: **“This is what the Sovereign Yahweh says: The east gateway of the inner wall will be closed during the six workdays each week, but it will be open on Sabbath days and the days of new moon celebrations....”** The six plus one pattern of Yahweh’s plan for us is reiterated (again). Here we see that the gateway directly across the courtyard from the one Yahshua used to enter the temple grounds will be restricted in its use. The inner east gate is reserved for the special periodic celebrations that speak so eloquently of the provision of God for His people. **“The prince will enter the foyer of the gateway from the outside. Then he will stand by the gatepost while the priest offers his burnt offering and peace offering. He will worship inside the gateway passage and then go back out the way he came....”** Since King Yahshua used this inner gate, no one else may pass through it, not all the way. This is metaphorical (I think) of the Son of Man’s approach to Yahweh—of His sinless perfection, something no other man has ever achieved. Prince David, though his heart is right before God, is not sinless except through the blood of Christ; he therefore cannot approach the throne of Yahweh through the same door the Messiah did—none of us can. Significantly, however, the door of opportunity to live a sinless life is left open all day long during the Sabbath—itself a picture of the Millennium—but no one who is not *actually* sinless may pass through it, and thus no one does, not even the prince. **“The gateway will not be closed until evening. The common people will worship Yahweh in front of this gateway on Sabbath days and the days of new moon celebrations....”**

The prince, as representative for his people, enters the gate structure to worship while the general populace does so from the courtyard outside. But this is not so much a position of power as it is of service: **“Each Sabbath day the prince will present to Yahweh a burnt offering of six lambs and one ram, all with no physical defects. He will present a grain offering of a half bushel of flour to go with the ram and whatever amount of flour he chooses to go with each lamb. He is to offer one gallon of olive oil for each half bushel of flour. At the new moon celebrations, he will bring one young bull, six lambs, and one ram, all with no physical defects. With the young bull he must bring a half bushel of flour for a grain offering. With the ram he must bring another half bushel of flour. And with each lamb he is to bring whatever amount of flour that he decides to give. With each half bushel of flour he must offer one gallon of olive oil....”** Again we see the six-plus-one pattern—“six lambs and one ram”—reminding us that Yahweh has planned for our redemption from the very beginning of creation.

**“The prince must enter the gateway through the foyer, and he must leave the same way he came. But when the people come in through the north gateway to worship Yahweh during the religious festivals, they must leave by the south gateway. And those who entered through the south gateway must leave by the north gateway. They must never leave by the same gateway they came in; they must always use the opposite gateway. The prince will enter and leave with the people on these occasions....”** These instructions may seem mysterious at first, but upon looking at the layout of the temple courtyard, God’s motive becomes clear (at least to me). Think of the courtyard as life. The outer courtyard is our mortal humanity, and the inner our life as believers—the inner gate represents the New Birth. Yahweh never intended that we pop our heads in the door, take a look around, and leave without participating. He has something far richer and more meaningful in mind for us, and it involves developing a relationship with Him. When we walk to the middle of the inner courtyard from either side, we find two things going on: people are worshipping Yahweh—communing with Him—at the eastern gate; and the altar stands as a constant reminder of *why* we worship Him. We are not to go through life without acknowledging Yahshua’s sacrifice and praising Him for what it did for us.

**“So at the special feasts and sacred festivals, the grain offering will be a half bushel of flour with each young bull, another half bushel of flour with each ram, and as much flour as the prince chooses to give with each lamb. One gallon of oil is to be given with each half bushel of flour. Whenever the prince offers a voluntary burnt offering or peace offering to Yahweh, the east gateway to the inner courtyard will be opened for him to enter, and he will offer his sacrifices just as he does on Sabbath days. Then he will turn and leave the way he entered, and the gateway will be shut behind him. Each morning a year-old lamb with no physical defects must be sacrificed as a burnt offering to Yahweh. With the lamb, a grain offering must also be given to Yahweh—about two and a half quarts of flour with a third of a gallon of olive oil to moisten the flour. This will be a permanent law for you....”** The offerings have three components, the sacrificial animals, the grain, and the oil. At the risk of over-simplifying things, I’d like to suggest that all of the blood sacrifices, whether bulls, rams, goats, or lambs, point one way or another to the crucifixion of Yahshua, without which there is no possibility of our reconciliation with Yahweh. The grain offerings represent our subsequent thanksgiving for God’s provision—not only for what sustains our physical lives, but for our spiritual sustenance as well. And the olive oil reminds us that the Spirit of Yahweh must accompany and permeate our offerings. “Religiously” going through the motions is pointless. **“The lamb, the grain offering, and the olive oil must be given as a daily sacrifice every morning without fail.”** (Ezekiel 46:1-15 NLT)

Remember what I said about the outer courtyard representing physical life, as the inner courtyard symbolizes spiritual life? We now see this metaphor being played out another way. **“Then the man brought me through the entrance beside the gateway and led me to the sacred rooms assigned to the priests, which faced toward the**

north. He showed me a place at the extreme west end of these rooms. He explained, 'This is where the priests will cook the meat from the guilt offerings and sin offerings and bake the flour from the grain offerings into bread. They will do it here to avoid carrying the sacrifices through the outer courtyard and harming the people by transmitting holiness to them [or as the NKJV puts it, **to sanctify the people**]....' The point is that the sin and guilt offerings are a reflection of the sacrifice of Christ, and are therefore holy—i.e., separation is required. Only the priests could prepare them. People who have not availed themselves of the atoning power of the Messiah's death cannot be saved by association with a replica of that sacrifice. Having a "form of godliness" is not enough. They must first enter the inner court—experience the New Birth—for the atonement sacrifices to have any real meaning.

That being said, there are also cooking facilities in the outer court, not for sin offerings, but for peace offerings. **"Then he brought me back to the outer courtyard and led me to each of its four corners. In each corner I saw an enclosure. Each of these enclosures was 70 feet long and 52½ feet wide, surrounded by walls. Along the inside of these walls was a ledge of stone with fireplaces under the ledge all the way around. The man said to me, 'These are the kitchens to be used by the Temple assistants to boil the sacrifices offered by the people.'**" (Ezekiel 46:19-24 NLT) These offerings are prepared not by the priests, but by their Levite assistants, and the people share in the feast. Peace offerings are fundamentally different from sin or guilt offerings. They are strictly voluntary. The animals sacrificed may be either male or female, and though they must still be spotless, deformed animals may be offered. If I understand this correctly, the picture is not so much of Christ's sacrifice as of our response to it. As Paul said, **"As many of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death.... Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."** (Romans 6:3, 6) The peace offering is not offered by one seeking peace but by one who has found it. Our word "peace" has a basically negative connotation, the absence of war or conflict. The familiar Hebrew word *shalom* doesn't stop there, however, but encompasses positive aspects as well—joy, wholeness, well-being.

Peace offerings are of three types: the thank offering (gratitude for specific past blessings), the vow offering (basically just good manners when petitioning Yahshua with a specific request), and the freewill offering (a bit like the thank offering, but with no particular blessing in mind—a general outpouring of thankfulness coupled with a desire for the continuance of God's blessings). I imagine there will be a lot of freewill-type sacrifices being offered during the Millennium. There certainly should be.

## Chapter 28

# The End of the Beginning

The Seventh Millennium won't last forever—any more than the six previous millennia of Yahweh's plan for man did. It was never designed to. As good as life will be during this time (in comparison to previous ages), this thousand-year period is not meant to be the end product of God's dealings with man, but rather a doorway to—a prophecy of—something infinitely larger and more wonderful. There are still loose ends here, and Yahweh is a God of order who will not allow issues to remain unresolved forever. The Millennium is God's way of bringing the story of mortal man to a conclusion, to tie up these loose ends, to finally balance the equation of life. It is not the marriage; it's the honeymoon. It is not the end; it's merely the end of the beginning.

Just as the Millennium will be a microcosm of the eternity that follows, Israel will prove to have been a microcosm of all mankind. What happens among the Jews will be symbolic of Yahweh's global plan. When God makes promises to Israel, He is also teaching principles that apply to the nations. **“Your people [Israel] shall all be righteous. They shall inherit the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. I, Yahweh, will hasten it in its time.”** (Isaiah 60:21-22) This promise is made to Israel, but I believe they will be a bellwether for believing gentiles during the Millennium: if they are righteous, they too will prosper.

In retrospect, it is a logical question to ask: “Why the Jews?” Why of all people did Yahweh choose to love and bless and dwell among the nation of Israel? I believe it's His idea of a worst-case scenario. If He can make and keep promises to a people who have been so rebellious throughout so much of their history—if He can bring even *them* to a place of permanent fellowship—then cleansing the rest of us from our sins can't be impossible. (Like the old Sinatra song said, “If I can make it here, I can make it *anywhere*.”) Since Yahweh's favorite human, David, was a murdering, adulterous Jewish scalawag who nevertheless loved and trusted God with all his heart, then there's hope for me, too.

It's a big clean-up job, but Yahweh is willing to purify the world, starting with the dirtiest corner: Israel. Isaiah writes, **“And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.”** They will be “called holy” not because they've somehow achieved perfection in their own strength, but because Yahweh has honored their newfound faith in Him with imputed righteousness—courtesy of the blood of Yahshua. **“When Yahweh has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged**

the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, then Yahweh will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.” (Isaiah 4:3-6) Yahweh Himself will be Israel’s protector. The Shekinah—the same manifestation of Yahweh that guided the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings with a cloud of smoke and a pillar of fire—will again be seen guarding the nation of Israel.

Ezekiel saw Israel’s miraculous turnaround as well, her cleansing and her restoration. **“Thus says the Lord Yahweh: ‘On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. So they will say, “This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.” Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, Yahweh, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, Yahweh, have spoken it, and I will do it.’”** (Ezekiel 36:33-36) Desolate land and ruined cities are commonplace in Israel today. Despite Israeli efforts, the destructive influence of Islam can still be seen in lands left fallow for fourteen centuries, and places like Bethlehem and Ramallah look like war zones—because they are. But God’s Millennial peace will bring with it healing and restoration. Why is Yahweh so interested in rebuilding Israel? Because by doing so, He will be demonstrating his love and power to all of the nations of the earth. The mortal descendants of the “sheep,” the Millennial patriarchs, will look at Israel and say, “Yahweh is awesome.”

Zechariah expands upon the thought: **“In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.”** This fountain—a literal water source flowing from beneath the temple (as the prophet described a few verses later in 14:8)—is metaphorical of the spiritual restoration that Yahshua will provide for the whole earth, beginning in Jerusalem and spreading throughout the planet. **“‘It shall be in that day,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land. It shall come to pass that if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who begot him will say to him, “You shall not live, because you have spoken lies in the name of Yahweh.” And his father and mother who begot him shall thrust him through when he prophesies....”** *Gee, that’s pretty harsh*, you’re probably thinking. Yes, it is, but Israel will by now realize that *not* being harsh with false prophets is how they got themselves in trouble in the first place. Now that they’re back, they’ll stop at nothing to stay in fellowship with Yahweh—just as He commanded back in Deuteronomy 18:20.

During the Millennium, no one will “prophecy” in the name of Yahweh, for Yahweh—in His human manifestation of King Yahshua—will be there among them, ready to call them liars. **“And it shall be in that day that every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies; they will not wear a robe of coarse hair to deceive. But he will say, ‘I am no prophet, I am a farmer; for a man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.’ And one will say to him, ‘What are these wounds between your arms?’ Then he will answer, ‘Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.’”** (Zechariah 13:1-6) Zack pictures false prophets the way he knew them—wearing rough John-the-Baptist garb and bearing the marks of self mutilation (cf. I Kings 18:28). False prophets these days are more likely to wear expensive Italian suits and ride in chauffeured limousines. But in the Millennium, those tempted to fleece the sheep in the name of God will think twice.

I don’t know about the rest of the world, but in Israel, it will be impossible to fool the faithful anyway, for **“This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ says Yahweh: ‘I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, “Know Yahweh,” for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”** (Hebrews 8:10-12, cf. Jeremiah 31:33-34) It is one thing to know *about* someone. It is something else entirely to *know* them. Israel will have a personal, intimate relationship with Yahshua their King, because He will dwell among them. They will have no more need for rabbis, theologians, or books like this one. They will no longer see “through a glass, darkly” but will have the Truth living with them.

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Yahshua spoke often of the “kingdom of God,” or the “kingdom of heaven,” terms that are apparently used interchangeably. For all practical purposes, this kingdom began at Yahshua’s birth in Bethlehem on the Feast of Tabernacles, 2 B.C. The shepherds who heard the good news of His birth were told that He was the Messiah—the promised heir to the throne of David, and a bit later the wise men asked Herod, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” As His public ministry began, **“Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’”** (Mark 1:14-15) At its heart this gospel, this good news, was that He Himself was the Messiah—the Anointed King. Christ confirmed this kingly status during His trial before Pontius Pilate. And as for the timing, we are given this clue: **“For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than**

he.” (Luke 7:28) John was the last of the Old Testament prophets—and in a way, the greatest of them, for he was given the privilege of announcing the coming of the Messiah. But John wasn’t actually a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, for he was murdered before King Yahshua took the throne by accepting the cross. Thus the least of us who gratefully live our lives in the shadow of the resurrection can consider ourselves “greater,” that is, more privileged, than John himself.

For those who have made Yahshua King over their lives in this age then, the kingdom of God is already in full swing. As real as it is to us however, we must admit that it is a kingdom in exile—our King is not physically present with us (in the sense of being seated on an earthly throne), and we ourselves feel like pilgrims in a land that is not our home.

That will change when the Kingdom of God moves into “phase two” at the beginning of the Millennium. For a thousand years, King Yahshua will rule the earth from His throne in Jerusalem—assisted by those who took part in the “first resurrection,” Old Testament and Church-age believers and Tribulation martyrs, all of whom are by this time clothed in their immortal resurrected bodies. The mortals over whom they will reign are the Millennial patriarchs and matriarchs (the “sheep” of Matthew 25) and their descendants—who will eventually number in the billions.

Here’s the rub: all who “enter the kingdom” must do so as mortals, for the faith required to make the choice to love Yahweh is a component of our mortality—immortals no longer need faith, for they will “know as they are known.” (cf. I Corinthians 13:12) Thus once phase two is over, no one will remain who has not made his or her choice either to love Yahweh or reject Him. As Paul put it, **“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”** (Acts 17:30-31) The teachings of Yahshua concerning the kingdom must be applied in practice before the close of the Millennium or not at all.

The ramifications of these teachings, however, will last throughout eternity—“phase three” of the kingdom of God. It therefore behooves us to pay careful attention to Yahshua’s teachings on the matter. We shouldn’t be too surprised to find that much of what He said defined who will enter the kingdom of heaven and who would not. The criteria must have been a bit shocking to his immediate first-century audience. The first surprise was that being a physical descendant of Abraham had nothing to do with one’s entrance or position in the kingdom: **“I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”** (Matthew 8:11-12) The Jews

considered themselves the “sons of the kingdom” by virtue of their family heritage, like being English or Swedish. But Yahshua was proclaiming that an individual’s faith, not genetic serendipity, was what made him a citizen of the kingdom of God. Further, there were to be negative consequences for failing to make the faith-inspired choice to enter the kingdom. In the end, there were only two places: the kingdom of heaven and elsewhere.

Nor was there any correlation between one’s temporal circumstances and their status in the kingdom. **“Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’ But Jesus looked at them and said to them, ‘With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible....’”** The disciples were of the mindset that if a man was rich, Yahweh must have blessed him—hence he was favored by God and would surely have a prominent role in the kingdom of heaven. On the contrary, Yahshua observed that more often than not, a rich man’s wealth is an impediment to faith, not the result of it. The accumulation of wealth can, in this sinful world, result just as easily from greed and aggression as it can from God’s blessings upon our labors. As He pointed out, one cannot serve two masters.

The illustration of the camel going through the eye of a needle (Greek *raphis*, a sewing needle) gets to the heart of the matter. There were gates in the walls of some cities that were so narrow (by design) that they were euphemistically called “needles.” But that’s not what Yahshua was talking about here. Camel? The Aramaic word He probably used, *gamla*, can mean either camel or rope (since ropes were made from camels’ hair). Either way, the point is not (as is often taught) that the camel must be unloaded—the wealth put down—before one can squeeze himself into the kingdom; rather, the point is the *utter impossibility* of man entering the kingdom of heaven through his own efforts. No matter how hard he tries, he can’t work his way in, and no matter how rich he is, he can’t buy his way in. Only Yahweh can provide access to Yahweh.

Peter, who clearly didn’t get it (yet), was laboring under a works-equals-salvation mentality. Yahshua gently corrected him, shifting his perception to a works-equals-*rewards* scenario. **“Then Peter answered and said to Him, ‘See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?’ So Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.’”** (Matthew 19:23-30, cf. Mark 10:23-31, Luke 18:24-30) Bringing the conversation back around to his original

point, Yahshua reiterated that one's status in this world—rich or poor, powerful or insignificant, successful or struggling—has absolutely nothing to do with his position in the kingdom of heaven. In fact, in many cases, the roles would be reversed—adversity can build character.

By the way, note that Yahshua has confirmed here the doctrine of a pre-millennial rapture. He knew the apostles would all have died many centuries *before* He returned to “sit on the throne of His glory,” going so far as to tell Peter *how* he would die. And yet he promised them positions of honor in His kingdom. That requires “regeneration,” the process Paul described in I Corinthians 15 whereby our corrupt mortal bodies are to be exchanged for incorruptible immortal bodies. Yahshua has left the Amillennialists no wiggle room whatsoever.

Still trying to shake his disciples out of their works-based mindset, Yahshua told them this parable: **“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.”** So far, everything makes sense. The laborers agreed to work a full day for a workingman's normal day's wage, one denarius. **“And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive....”** At various times throughout the day, the master hired more workers. The picture is one of joining Yahshua's service—entering his kingdom—at different stages of life. Some of us enter the kingdom as mere children, spending many years thereafter in God's vineyard; others (like the repentant thief on the cross) make the choice to follow Yahshua very late in their lives—too late to really “accomplish” anything for God.

**“So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.’ And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.’ But he answered one of them and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’ So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”** (Matthew 20:1-16) No matter how late it was when the workers entered the vineyard, they all received

the same wages. In the same way, those who enter the kingdom of heaven late in life receive the same salvation as those who came in earlier. That's grace. Nobody gets more grace than anybody else, because our works have nothing to do with our salvation. Nor can we logically be jealous of those who waited until the eleventh hour to apply for citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. Life without Christ is no picnic, no matter what the beer commercials say.

What does that last enigmatic phrase—**"Many are called but few are chosen"**—mean? "Called" is the Greek word *kletos*, meaning "invited." Interestingly, it is part of the word we use to describe the Holy Spirit—*parakletos*—an intercessor, consoler, advocate, or comforter—one who is called upon, invited, to aid or plead the case of another. Citizens of the kingdom of Heaven call upon the Holy Spirit who lives within them, the same Holy Spirit who called or invited them into the kingdom in the first place. Sadly, though, not all who are called will accept the invitation. Thus they are not "chosen" (Greek *eklektos*) or "picked out" by God. Remember, the choice is *our* prerogative: Yahweh will not choose us if we do not wish to be chosen.

Using the vineyard again as a metaphor for the kingdom of heaven, Yahshua endeavored to teach the chief priests and elders the error of their ways: **"What do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went."** That's repentance. **"Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go."** That's hypocrisy. **"Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to Him, 'The first.'"** Obviously. **"Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John [the Baptist] came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.'" (Matthew 21:28-32)** The Jewish elders no doubt thought that their exalted position in the hierarchy of Israel's religious establishment would qualify them for similar honor in the kingdom of heaven. Yahweh pointedly informed them that they hadn't even *entered* the kingdom—and never would if they didn't repent like the tax collectors and prostitutes had when they'd heard John's message. The parable points out the fallacy of religious pretension. It is worse than pointless—it's counterproductive—to say you're doing God's will if you're merely being religious. Don't deceive yourself. He's not stupid. He knows the difference.

By the way, Yahshua wasn't advocating the path of reformed hookers and ex-government-sponsored thieves as the ideal way to enter the kingdom of heaven. His point was the necessity of repentance—of facing up to our guilt and turning away from it. But knowing that the consequences of our sins would remain to plague us even after we repented from them, He wished to spare us. Yes, you

could get the questionable tattoo, repent, and have it removed, but it would be far less painful to simply avoid getting the tattoo in the first place. We are all sinners, but the less we have to repent from, the better it is for us. **“The disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.”** (Matthew 18:1-5) And again, **“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”** (Mark 10:14-15)

It’s not that little children are sinless—as a father, I can assure you that they are not. It’s their reliance on the relationship they have with their parents that Yahshua was telling us to emulate. Kids trust their moms and dads; they rely on them, communicate with them, center their world around them, seek to please them—in short, they love them, unconditionally, even irrationally sometimes. So when Yahshua says that we are to be “converted and become as little children,” He’s saying that we need to have the same kind of close relationship with our Heavenly Father that a three- or four-year-old (ideally) has with his daddy. Little kids don’t want to be independent; they want to be like their folks. They don’t want to impress their parents; they want to please them. They don’t work on that crayon drawing in order to gain favor with mom and dad; they do it as a natural outpouring of their love. And when their folks get angry with them, they don’t rationalize and they don’t fight back—they just crumble. That’s why **“Jesus called them to Him and said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”** (Luke 18:16-17)

We’re getting the picture that the citizenship requirements for the kingdom of heaven are not particularly intuitive. Where we would naturally think, based upon our earthbound observations, that the intelligent, powerful, beautiful, wealthy, and hard working would have the inside track, we learn from Yahshua that it’s not like that at all. He’s looking for the trusting, loving, loyal, dependent—even helpless—soul. We are *children* of God. There’s nothing a little kid can do to earn his food—he must simply accept it from the parents who love him.

Nor is Yahshua particularly interested in quantity—in huge numbers of “converts.” True, God does not *want* anyone to perish in his sins, but He is not willing (or even *able*, considering His nature) to compromise His standards of holiness in order to populate the kingdom with people who don’t really have any desire to be there. **“One said to Him, ‘Lord, are there few who are saved?’ And He said to them, ‘Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and**

**will not be able.”** (Luke 13:23-24) Buried within the man’s question was the idea, “Precisely how hard am I going to have to work to make the cut?” Yahshua didn’t bother answering directly but, as usual, cut right to the chase: you can’t get into the kingdom of heaven at all by working for it. Consequently, all works-based religions are blind alleys (and all religions, by the way, *are* works-based—real Christianity is not a religion). Contrary to popular theology, there are not “many paths to God.” There is only one: Yahshua. He is the narrow gate because He alone provides the portal through which sinful man can approach a Holy God. It’s not a question of us becoming “good enough.” That’s the error of religion, and Christ says to those who attempt it, **“You will seek to enter and will not be able.”** It is, rather, a matter of allowing the righteousness of Yahweh and His Messiah (which is not only “good enough,” but is the very *definition* of good) to be accounted unto us, as it was to Abraham (see Genesis 15:6). That is what it means to “enter through the narrow gate.” Remember our discussion of the “camel” and the “needle” a few pages back? Here, the narrow gate *is* the “needle” (so to speak). But what must be “unloaded” in order to get through is not our wealth, but our very righteousness: the concept—the pretense—that we might be found worthy to stand before God by virtue of our own good works. It isn’t going to happen.

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One way or another, there will come for every man a time when his choices are set in stone. If he has chosen not to walk through the narrow gate, he will one day find that gate closed forever. **“When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from,’ then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’”** There has been no lack of opportunity to accept God’s grace. Through the Church, the scriptures, and the Spirit of God, the world has been rubbing shoulders with Yahshua for the last two millennia (and even when the Church has fallen down on the job and suppressed the scriptures, Yahweh has made His glory known through the magnificence of His creation). **“But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’”** No matter how many “works” we did, the only thing that counts in the end is whether or not Yahweh “knows us,” for if He doesn’t, all our works, however altruistic they might have seemed, are nothing but iniquity, filth, sin. **“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you [unrepentant Jews] see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. They [i.e., the gentiles] will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be**

**last.”** (Luke 13:25-30) This last few verses bring out an important point. Those locked out of the kingdom will be perfectly aware of its existence and of who lives there. Damned souls will *know* what they’re missing—hence the remorseful “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Yahshua’s story about a guy who owed ten thousand talents reinforces the concept of grace. **“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents....”** It’s judgment day, and this poor fellow is in so deep it’s ridiculous (just like you and me). A talent was a weight of a precious metal; estimates range from 75 to 90 pounds. Thus a talent of gold at today’s prices (let’s round it off to an even \$1500 per ounce) would be worth (at the more conservative 75-pound figure) about \$1,800,000. So this guy owed roughly eighteen *billion* dollars.

**“But as he was not able to pay** (What was your first clue, Sherlock?), **his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt....”** We’re talkin’ Grace here, with a capital G. The servant’s plea was ludicrous, not to mention impossible—the rough equivalent of you or me telling Yahweh, “Bail me out, Lord, and I won’t do anything wrong for the rest of my life.” The debt we owe is so large (even if it’s only one little sin), we could never reasonably hope to make a dent in it, nor could we transform ourselves into sinless creatures for ten minutes, let alone the rest of our lives. But the Master, in His compassion, offers to cancel the debt—the whole eighteen billion bucks worth. That’s not all there is to it, though. In the parable, it’s real money—gold (as opposed to Federal Reserve funny money). The real cost has to be borne by *somebody*, and that somebody is the Master Himself. Remarkably, He’s willing to pay it, but there’s a catch, sort of. The servant has to accept it.

**“But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii....”** To put this in perspective, a talent is equivalent to 6,000 denarii. A denarius is a typical workingman’s daily wage—which ought to make it about \$300 in today’s money, though the reality is about a third of that, due to tampering with the money supply by the Federal Reserve—don’t get me started. This guy, then, owed the first servant about what a typical upwardly mobile American might owe on his car, credit cards, and/or student loans—a significant amount, but not out of reach. **“And he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’”** These are the very same words that had elicited mercy from the Master. **“And he would not, but went and threw him**

into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses." (Matthew 18:23-35) To my mind, it wasn't just the servant's unmerciful spirit that got him back in trouble with the Master. It was the fact that he was still trying to pay off the debt on his own. *Hey, a hundred denarii here and a hundred there can really start to add up.* He hadn't accepted the grace that had been offered to him; he was still trying to work his way back into favor after the debt had been forgiven—paid for in full through the Master's personal sacrifice. The wicked servant was saying, in effect, "Your sacrifice is of no value to me—my works ought to be sufficient." No, they're not.

Notice, by the way, that when the Master first demanded payment, the servant was only going to be sold to someone else—he was going to lose his freedom, family, and possessions. But after he had rejected the Master's magnanimous gift, he was sent off to be *tortured* until he could do the impossible. Is that significant? You tell me.

Don't misunderstand. There's nothing wrong with doing good works. But outside of the will of God, they are, at best, their own reward. Yahshua said, "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"** (Matthew 7:21-23) Even heavy-duty industrial-strength good works like prophesying in God's name, exorcising demons, and performing miracles will be considered "lawlessness" on the day of judgment if the one doing the works has no relationship with Yahweh. Good works are to be done *because* we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven; they are of no use whatsoever in achieving that status. In a sane world, illegal aliens are not commended for obeying the traffic laws. In a sense, driving under the speed limit or stopping at red lights is *still* illegal for them.

I think we can safely say that Yahshua has by this time clearly defined the criteria for citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. Neither money nor effort nor position nor ancestry have anything to do with it. The only thing that will avail is our acceptance of the grace of God. "**The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" (Romans 6:23) But there's more to the kingdom

than the front door. He also had a few things to say about the kingdom's growth and development, some of which are not what we might expect.

For example, let's revisit the parable of the wheat and the tares (i.e., weeds that look like wheat), for it has a direct bearing on the subject at hand—the wrapping up of the final loose end: mortal man's time upon the earth. Matthew records the parable in one place and Yahshua's explanation a few verses later; I'd like to blend them together, putting Christ's definitions in parentheses. **"The kingdom of heaven is like a man (the Son of Man—Yahshua) who sowed good seed (the sons of the kingdom) in his field (the world); but while men slept, his enemy (the devil) came and sowed tares (the sons of the wicked one) among the wheat (the sons of the kingdom) and went his way..."** At first glance, everybody in the world looks pretty much alike—we're all sinners. Some have been saved by grace, however, while others are counting on other means (religion, temporal riches, *denial*) to attain their conception of the kingdom of heaven. They may look like "wheat" kernels but they're actually weed seeds. By the way, notice that Satan was only able to pull this off because "men" (that's us) were asleep. We need to wake up, watch and pray.

**"But when the grain (the sons of the kingdom) had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares (the sons of the wicked one) also appeared."** There comes a point in time when our beliefs mature and we can be identified by the fruit we bear—or don't bear. **"So the servants of the owner (the Son of Man) came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed (the sons of the kingdom) in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy (the devil) has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares (the sons of the wicked one) you also uproot the wheat (the sons of the kingdom) with them. Let both grow together until the harvest (the end of the age)..."** Did you ever find yourself wishing that God would come down and wipe out all the evil in the world—just wipe the slate clean? Not a Noah's-flood-style cataclysm, you understand, just removal of everything that didn't mesh with your "Christian" world view. I suppose He could, but you'd be in deep trouble if He did. The company you work for would fold, either because most of the employees were gone or most of its clients were. But you couldn't get to work anyway, because the fuel your car runs on depends on "evil" people at some stage to make it from the ground to your gas tank. That farmer who grows the lettuce in your salad? He's history, as is the truck driver who would have brought it to the market that isn't open any more. You get the picture. Yahweh can't delete the evil from the world without causing serious problems for his own people. And His love precludes Him from "rushing to judgment" before everyone has had ample opportunity to make a well reasoned choice to either love Him or not. So He lets the "sons of the kingdom" and the "sons of the wicked one" grow side by side today, and they will continue to do so until the rapture.

Is the rapture, then, what Yahshua was referring to when He spoke of “the harvest?” I don’t think so. Note carefully the order Yahshua specifies here: **“And at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers (the angels), ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn....’”** At the time of the rapture, the wheat is taken *first* and the tares are left—the opposite of the order of events in the parable. There is obviously going to be one fulfillment of this prophecy in the separation of the sheep and goats at the beginning of the Millennium. But the “wheat” consists of more than just the Old Testament saints, the Church, and the Tribulation believers. It is defined as “the sons of the kingdom,” and thus includes the Millennial saints as well. The ultimate harvest—the end of the age—is therefore the final judgment God has scheduled for the conclusion of the Millennium (something we’ll cover a bit later in this chapter).

Yahshua concludes by confirming the bad news—and the good news: **“Therefore as the tares (the sons of the wicked one) are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”** (Matthew 13:24-30, 37-43) The weeds (those who are offensive and lawless) will be removed from the kingdom and burned. This must refer to phase two of the kingdom of God—the Millennium—first because we’ve seen that it’s the wheat, not the weeds, that will be taken out at the end of the Church age, and second, because (as we shall see) *only* wheat will be left on earth at the end of the thousand-year reign of Yahshua. As far as I can tell, we’ll never really “shine forth as the sun” as long as we live in these cursed mortal bodies; I believe (SF2) we’re being given our first glimpse of heaven here. The “kingdom of their father” is specifically phase three, when all of God’s children will have received their immortal resurrection bodies.

Mark records more of Yahshua’s teaching on the way the kingdom of heaven would grow. **“And He said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head....’”** To look at a seed, you would never guess that putting it in the earth would enable it to grow into a plant. A wheat kernel doesn’t seem to resemble the plant that will grow from it, nor does a stout oak tree bear any obvious similarity to the acorn from which it sprouted. And yet there is a relationship—at the molecular level. A plant’s DNA determines that a kernel of wheat won’t grow into a peach tree, nor will an acorn develop into a corn stalk. In the same way, the kingdom of heaven derives its “DNA” directly from Yahshua. We may not look much like Him while we’re still mere seedlings, but time will reveal just who’s spiritual DNA flows within us. I’ll admit, in the Church age,

selective breeding has produced many rather odd looking variations, ranging from the tangy Pentecostal breed of “wheat” to the somewhat more bland Greek Orthodox variety. The breeds are so diverse, in fact, that if you didn’t know, you might think they were different kinds of plants. But there’s one way to know for sure: look at the fruit they bear. In every case, you can take the grain they produce, grind it up in the mill of life, and make bread out of it that will nourish the world. But—and this is very important—if there is no grain when the plant is mature, then it’s not really wheat, but a look-alike weed.

Yahshua’s simile wasn’t quite done. **“But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come....”** The wheat doesn’t just stand there in the field indefinitely. When it’s mature, it’s harvested. The kingdom of heaven is no different. Yes, our mortal bodies are planted in the earth; they sprout, grow, and mature. But at the end of the age, we will be harvested—and changed into something infinitely better.

**“Then He said, ‘To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.’”**

(Mark 4:26-32) The kingdom of God would begin as a tiny seed: a handful of Christ’s followers, powerless, discouraged, and fearful. But with God’s DNA—the Holy Spirit—coursing through their veins, it has grown into a surprisingly large “tree,” (as it’s called in the parallel passage in Matthew 13) with many branches reaching toward heaven. Note that it’s the mustard *plant* that’s the metaphor for the kingdom. The birds who are taking shelter there are not “in the kingdom” except by proximity; they’re mere opportunists, hanging around the mustard bush for what they can get out of it.

Stated another way, **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”**

(Matthew 13:47-50) Like the wheat and the weeds, and like the mustard plant and the birds, we see the fishermen gathering all “kinds” of fish in the same net. (The word “kind” is actually the Greek *genos*, denoting family, race, birth—the distinction here is between Yahweh’s “fish” and somebody else’s.) At the final sorting: the “good” fish will be “gathered,” (a picture of the rapture and subsequent harvests at the end of the Tribulation and again at the end of the Millennium) and the “bad,” inedible fish will be thrown away. As usual, the theme is separation: the righteous from the evil, the fruitful from the barren, the producer from the parasite. Yahweh said to “be holy, for I am holy.” That’s all

holiness is: separation from the world, being set apart for God. You can't keep a foot in both places forever.

The reason Yahshua had to describe the kingdom of God through a series of parables is that it defies direct comparison with any earthly institution. It's not, strictly speaking, an organization, club, political entity, or even a religion. It can't be seen, visited, taxed, assisted, or conquered. It's like a family in that you can't join it—you have to be born into it. But it's a family into which you can *choose* to be born (through adoption). As Yahshua put it to Nicodemus, **“Unless one is born again (literally: from above), he cannot see the kingdom of God.... Unless one is born of water (physical birth) and the Spirit (spiritual re-birth in Yahweh's Spirit), he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”** (John 3:3, 5-6) Unfortunately, if it is possible to be “born from above,” it is also possible to be “born from below,” re-born into the spirit and family of Satan—but like God's family, you must choose to belong to the devil: he cannot force anyone to align themselves with him.

The kingdom of God has a King, of course, but His is a dynasty of One: the King is eternal. In short, the kingdom of heaven is a relationship unique in our experience—a relationship between two fundamentally different types of beings, an infinite Creator, and a finite creature whom He made for this specific purpose. We'll never really get a handle on this relationship, the kingdom of God, until we begin to understand the nature of God Himself—and more importantly, how He's different from us.

We understand “finite,” of course, because that's what we are. “Infinite,” though, is merely a word we use for our own convenience; it has no meaning we can fully comprehend. It's not just being “more,” like taking a straight line from one end of the universe to the other and then imagining a line even longer than that. In fact, there is evidence that in the three dimensions of our existence, Yahweh is *not* “infinite.” Before you pick up rocks to stone me, consider this: Why did David, in agony over his sins, plead with Yahweh not to take his Holy Spirit away from him? And why did Yahshua promise to *send* the Holy Spirit to live within His followers? If God were infinite in our three dimensions, then there would logically be no place where He could *not* be. The Holy Spirit would have to be *everywhere* whether he wanted to be there or not—including within unbelievers. Or how about this? If you define “hell,” as a place where God chooses not to go, how is that possible if He is infinite—everywhere? Deal with it: Yahweh exercises volition over His own attributes.

Complicating matters is this enigmatic snippet from Luke's gospel. **“Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, “See here!” or “See there!” For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”** (Luke 17:20-21)

The kingdom of God was *within* the Pharisees? I don't think so, although the Greek word *entos* can mean within or inside. It can also mean "among" or "in the midst of"—and Yahshua was indeed standing there among them. This leads me to the conclusion that Yahshua *Himself* is the kingdom of God—the very personification of the relationship between infinite God and finite man.

Clearly, though, we're missing something when we confine ourselves to our own world when trying to comprehend our Creator. We exist in three dimensions (length, breadth, and depth) and can understand a fourth, time. Angelic beings apparently exist in all four of these dimensions, though like us, they are finite in each of them. Yahweh, on the other hand, has even more dimensions—perhaps many more—and is clearly infinite in time and perhaps in other dimensions as well. That, of course, is why He chose to use prophecy to convey and confirm his intentions for the course of human history. But it's also why we have such a hard time understanding His greatness.

A friend of mine uses a provocative metaphor to illustrate what we're up against: think of God as Walt Disney, and think of humanity as Mickey Mouse. Walt exists in three dimensions, but Mickey exists in only two. Walt, being Mickey's creator, knows all about him—as a matter of fact, he built a little of his own personality into his cartoon mouse (something he chose not to do with other creations like Donald Duck or Pluto). But does Mickey understand Walt? Can Mickey communicate with him, relate to him, love him? Only insofar as Walt himself enables it. Mickey doesn't have enough dimensions to comprehend his creator on his own.

In a similar way, we can't fully appreciate our Creator in our mortal three-dimensional bodies. And it should drive us to our knees when we realize that Yahshua's sacrifice wasn't confined to the cross. That was merely the grand finale. He voluntarily relinquished *dimensions* in order to come and save us—it's as if Walt Disney *became* Mickey Mouse in order to rescue Donald and Pluto. We sometimes illustrate Christ's advent with the fable of a man becoming an ant so he could save the ant colony, but it's worse than that: the man would have to become a *picture* of an ant. By the same token, however, I have reason to believe that we will *gain* dimensions (at least one—time) when we are given our immortal resurrection bodies. And that in turn will allow us to comprehend more clearly who Yahweh is and what He has done for us.

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At the end of the chapter 25, we discussed the seemingly odd fact that Satan won't be destroyed at the beginning of the Millennium, but will rather be merely

locked up for a thousand years. We may safely presume that his demons are incarcerated as well, for Paul tells us, **“Having disarmed principalities and powers, [Yahshua] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”** (Colossians 2:15)

So as the Millennium draws to a close, we witness with a shudder what John records: **“Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea....”** Apparently, some people can’t learn from books and teachers; they have to get their knowledge the hard way—by bitter experience. It is quite reasonable to assume that by this time the world’s population will have grown back to today’s levels—hovering around the seven billion mark. The mortal population of earth consists of the repentant Jews, the “sheep” who entered the Millennium at the close of the Tribulation, and their descendants. Bear in mind that all of these offspring have the same fallen, sinful nature that plagues us today.

The descendants have been living all their lives in a perfect society, free of war and crime, environmentally restored, and prosperous beyond the wildest dreams of pre-Tribulation man. And yet, when Satan is released, he will apparently have no problem deceiving many of them into thinking that Yahshua is somehow treating them unfairly, being unduly harsh with the rebels who occasionally pop their heads up, or that He’s otherwise unfit to be their King. They will have absolutely no frame of reference, of course, except for the horror stories that are told of what life was like before he returned (or as Satan will put it, *took over*). These disgruntled citizens (with a little satanic suggestion) will find it intolerable that their leaders have to bow to the King and honor His people, the Jews, showing their faces every year at the Feast of Tabernacles. *And what is it with those animal sacrifices they’ve got going on in the Jerusalem temple? They’re barbaric and old fashioned, blah, blah, blah.* They’ll swallow Satan’s bait, hook, line, and sinker. After all, he’s the one who, upon finding himself the best angel in the universe, decided that wasn’t good enough—He wanted to be “like God.” He’s the king of discontent.

Why does John call them Gog and Magog? Are the rebels Scythian hordes? Are they Muslims, like the last time? No, but they’ll follow the same incredibly stupid game plan. **“They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city.”** That’s right: they’re going after the Jews! **“And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them....”** Can you believe it? It’s the un-battle of Magog all over again. The only positive element I see here is that Israel, for once in their lives, are not part of this rebellion. This time, they will be impervious to the devil’s trickery. If I were a betting man, I’d wager that not a single Jew will be deceived (SF3).

So what's going to happen to Satan this time? Another thousand-year stint in the hoosegow? Nope. He's a three-time loser. **"The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."** (Revelation 20:7-10) That's a life sentence, if you can call it livin'. No more possibility of parole.

Seven hundred years before Christ's first advent, Isaiah saw it unfolding: **"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!..."** This is the only time in the entire Bible where Satan's name is mentioned. Maybe. The Hebrew word (if we take Strong's acceptance of the Masoretic text's vowel points as reliable) is *heylel*, meaning "the morning star." But the word from which this is derived—and perhaps the actual word itself, since the consonants are identical, is *halal*: to be clear, to shine, which has a second, less flattering connotation as well. It can mean "to make a show, to boast," hence, to be "clamorously foolish," to "stultify." Webster defines *stultify*: "To make or cause to appear foolish or ridiculous; to reduce to foolishness or absurdity; to render wholly futile or ineffectual." The next time you're tempted to give Satan any credit or respect, remember that. By the way, *halal* in Arabic means "moon god," a proper definition of Allah. If you didn't know before, now you do: Allah and Satan are one.

**"How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God [a euphemism for angels]; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High....'"** Sorry, big guy. You're a couple of dimensions short of deity. This is like Goofy announcing that he's going to draw Walt from now on—it's absurd.

Isaiah had his number. **"Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol [the abode of the dead], to the lowest depths of the Pit. Those who see you will gaze at you, and consider you, saying: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities, who did not open the house of his prisoners?'"** (Isaiah 14:12-17) We're going to be discussing Sheol, Hades, Hell, and the lake of fire later. But for now, notice that Satan and the men he deceived into doing his bidding ("those who see you") are all going to be together in the "Pit," but "his prisoners" seem to be in a different category. Satan—he who seemed so formidable when he roamed the earth "like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"—will be an object of scorn and derision in this brave new underworld. Forget the odd idea that hell is Satan's realm—he's merely one of the inmates, toothless and impotent.

The demons, and no doubt Satan as well, know that their judgment is coming, and they have some idea as to when. This is illustrated by an encounter that took place near the Sea of Galilee. **"When [Yahshua] had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the**

tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. And suddenly they cried out, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" (Matthew 8:28-29) The demons inhabiting these poor guys knew Yahshua, and they knew He would "torment" them at some future point. But they were pretty sure they had some time left before their ultimate judgment day (and Yahshua did not disagree). We aren't specifically told, but it's reasonable to assume that this judgment day occurs at the same time as Satan's, which we just saw: **"The devil...was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone...and will be tormented day and night forever and ever."** (Revelation 20:10)

Some demons are loose in the world today, but some really nasty ones, as we have seen, have been locked up in the abyss (where Satan will cool his heels for a thousand years) awaiting their doom. **"And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day."** (Jude 6) Peter concurs: **"God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell [tartaros: the deepest part of sheol or hades] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment."** (II Peter 2:4) This "great day" of judgment is scheduled for the end of the Millennium.

The timing—the idea that the final judgment of demons and men all takes place at the same time—is confirmed by Isaiah: **"It shall come to pass in that day that Yahweh will punish on high the host of exalted ones, and on the earth the kings of the earth."** The demons are not all earthbound, as men are. They will be retrieved from their places "on high" (wherever that is) as the kings of the earth are brought together for punishment. But they'll all share the same fate: **"They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison. After many days they will be punished..."** Yahweh is letting His prophet know that evil will be allowed to run rampant upon the earth for "many days"—but not forever.

Isaiah's parting shot is fascinating: **"Then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed; for Yahweh of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously."** (Isaiah 24:21-23) Virtually every "religion" on earth from the dawn of time forward has incorporated some permutation of either sun or moon worship as a central pillar. We have stumbled across this phenomenon dozens of times in previous chapters, from the Babylonians' Tammuz to the Romans' Mithras to the Muslims' Allah. The source of all of this nonsense is Satan himself: *heylel (or halal) ben shachar*, "Lucifer, son of the morning." The morning star, of course, is the sun—the giver of light and life (or at least that's what Satan would like you to believe). Satan doesn't much care whether you worship him directly as the sun god, venerate his reflection as the moon god, or worship a vague "spirit of enlightenment," just so long as he can prevent you from focusing on the One True God, Yahweh. Here we see both the sun and moon disqualified as "god material," out-shined by the source of all light sources,

Yahweh Himself. I find it significant that Yahweh designed the tabernacle/temple with a single entrance—facing east. That means that in order to approach the Plan of God (which is what the tabernacle symbolizes), one must first *turn his back* on the rising sun, on *helel ben shachar*, and instead walk toward the true source of light in this world.

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And what of those discontented Millennial souls who took Satan’s advice to go public with their heartfelt hatred of Yahshua? Paul once wrote, **“The Lord Jesus Christ...will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.”** (II Timothy 4:1) That time has come. The last mortal has made his choice, demonstrating by his actions whom he believes and trusts—Yahweh or Satan. John saw it all: **“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God....”** If you’ll recall, a bit earlier (in verse 5) we read that “the rest of the dead (that is, other than the Millennial Martyrs who were being resurrected there at the end of the Tribulation) did not live again until the thousand years—the Millennial reign of Yahshua—were finished.” Now that the thousand years are in the history books, we see these people “living again” so that they might experience judgment.

**“And books were opened.”** This is the record of their words and deeds—their works. **“And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life.”** (Revelation 20:11-12) This isn’t the first time the “Book of Life” is seen in scripture. As far back as the Exodus, it was understood that there was a heavenly “book” in which was recorded the names of God’s people. **“Then Moses returned to Yahweh and said, ‘Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will, forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.’ And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.’”** (Exodus 32:31-33) Significantly, the names of people aren’t added to the book when they’re saved, but rather they’re deleted—“blotted out”—when they choose *not* to follow Yahweh—or worse, choose to align themselves with Satan. Everybody starts out written in the Book of Life—you have to “ask” to be removed from the list. And as Moses (and later Paul, cf. Romans 9:3) found out, you can’t relinquish your place in the Book in the hope of saving others—it doesn’t work that way.

David’s prayer was that his adversaries (and prophetically, Messiah’s—cf. verse 21) would not enter the kingdom of heaven: **“Add iniquity to their iniquity, and let them not come into Your righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the**

living, and not be written with the righteous.” (Psalm 69:28) Daniel foresaw temporal deliverance for the faithful: **“At that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.”** (Daniel 12:1) On the other hand, Yahweh put things in perspective when He taught that citizenship in the kingdom of heaven is far more significant than anything that transpires here on earth. **“Behold, I give you [disciples] the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”** (Luke 10:19-20)

The final mention of the Book of Life occurs in the last verse of the next-to-last chapter in the Bible. **“There shall by no means enter [the New Jerusalem] anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”** (Revelation 21:27) We’ll discuss the New Jerusalem later. Notice that the Lamb’s Book of Life is the final arbiter of holiness—no one whose holiness isn’t certified by his name’s entry will be admitted to where God is. The book separates the saved from the lost; it lists those whose sins are covered by the blood of Yahshua, but those who have rejected God’s grace have been “blotted out.”

Thus we read, **“And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”** (Revelation 20:12) These “books,” as we saw earlier, are not the Lamb’s Book of Life, but rather the comprehensive record of the words and deeds of every person who ever lived. “Religious” people the world over are going to get exactly what they always said they wanted: to be judged on their works. What’s happening here is that the Book of Life is used as a reference guide: if their names aren’t found in that volume, the Judge has no alternative but to base His decision upon what the defendants did in their lives. It’s the only evidence available.

In our imaginations, we may be picturing a typical courtroom. The Judge knows going in that **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”** (Romans 3:23) but He’s the epitome of fairness—He’s still willing to look at all the evidence, perform all the forensic tests, and listen to all the witnesses. The problem for most defendants is that they’re expecting to be evaluated on a sliding scale—the old shades-of-gray mentality. They think the “better” people should get to slide in, and the “worse” people (of whom there surely must be quite a few) won’t make the cut. *But it doesn’t work like that*, the bailiff informs them. *Because God is holy, those who want to live in His presence must be holy as well—darkness and light cannot coexist. But because nobody is holy, God provided the covering of Yahshua’s sacrifice for them—it’s like a garment the saints put on, making their sins invisible to God. (He’s not stupid, of course. He knows how it works. But it’s*

*Yahweh's prerogative to choose to blind Himself to the sins of His children.) Anyway, all they had to do is accept it, put it on. Did you?*

*No, the defendant bristles. The garment didn't fit my lifestyle very well. It wasn't in fashion, and I didn't much care for the color, either. White is so boring. Besides, why would I want to hang out with a bunch of people wearing these ridiculous outfits? I like mine much better.*

*Yes, the Judge sighs. It's very stylish. But I can still see your sins showing through.*

There's far more going on than this, but I'll have to save it for the next chapter, where I'll try to get to the bottom of precisely what's being decided here at the GWT. I can solemnly assure you that this kind of light banter *won't* be taking place—not after we just read, **“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.”** When the books of a man's deeds are opened and he's faced with Yahweh's holy presence, no defense will sound plausible.

Who, exactly, is in view here, standing before the Great White Throne? Perhaps we should start by defining who is *not* here: **“There is...no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”** (Romans 8:1) Paul goes on to explain, **“Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.”** (Romans 8:33-34) If God has justified us, He isn't about to turn around and condemn us. It doesn't matter if Satan himself is standing before God's throne breathing accusations and slander; Yahshua is there too, defending us. As Paul told the believers at Thessalonica, **“Jesus...delivers us from the wrath to come.”** (I Thessalonians 1:10)

Peter draws the same contrast Paul did: **“The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”** (II Peter 2:9) The word for “temptations” is the Greek *peirasmos*, which means a “trial or proving” as much as it does an enticement to sin. Thus though the NKJV rendering is no doubt true, I would submit that Peter is actually talking about God's willingness to “deliver the godly out of *trials*”—the same trials the “unjust” will face at the Great White Throne. Paul concurs: **“What have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside [the Church]? But those who are outside God judges.”** (I Corinthians 5:12-13) His point is that while the body of Christ is to constantly inspect itself in the interest of staying healthy and free from heresy and corruption, that is not our job in the case of nonbelievers. Yahweh Himself will take care of that—here at the Great White Throne.

Job put it this way: **“For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom; They shall be brought out on the day of wrath.”** (Job 21:30) James was somewhat less succinct in his scathing rebuke of those whose god is their wealth: **“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [i.e., armies]. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.”** (James 5:1-6) The lessons apply to everyone, not just the rich. The things we put ahead of God will be a “witness against us” at the final judgment.

Who, then, will stand before the Great White Throne? Dead people: **“The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.”** (Revelation 20:13) Unbelieving dead of every age—right up through the last “battle”—will face the GWT together. Everyone who is there is said to be evaluated on the basis of their *works*, which leads us to the grim conclusion that none of their names are to be found in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

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Since our timeline has reached the end of the Millennium, this might be a good time to do a complete breakdown of the disposition of all of the world’s populations throughout history, both the saved and the lost:

- (1) Those who had died in Yahshua during, and perhaps prior to, the Church age will be caught up immediately before the living saints at the rapture of the Church. (I Thessalonians 4:16-17; I Corinthians 15:51-52) Having been given immortal, “spiritual” bodies, they (we) will all return to the earth with Christ at His second coming and reign with Him during the Millennium. The saved of the Old Testament period—those who, like Abraham and Job, trusted Yahweh for future redemption through His Messiah—may be included with this group. It’s also possible that they were “harvested” at Yahshua’s resurrection (see Matthew 27:52-53).
- (2) Those saved after the rapture but who subsequently die before the end of the Tribulation are also given (at Yahshua’s final coming) immortal bodies like those in group (1) and will also reign with Christ during the Millennium. These two groups comprise the “first resurrection,” and they’re called “blessed and holy.” (Revelation 20:4-6) An alternate

scenario: some hold (though I do not—SF3) that those who become believers and die after the rapture—but are not specifically *beheaded* for their faith (since there are thousands of ways to die during the great unpleasantness, and they can't all be called martyrdom)—are not included in the group singled out in Revelation 20:4. If they're not, they will remain in their graves until the Great White Throne, at which time their names will be found in the Lamb's Book of Life. They would thus be declared "not guilty" by virtue of the blood of Christ and be given their immortal bodies at this time. The eternal outlook is identical either way.

- (3) Those saved after the rapture who are still alive at the close of the Tribulation will enter the Millennium in their mortal bodies, becoming the patriarchs and matriarchs of the restored world. Their eternal destinies are secure, even though they are still mortals (not unlike believers today, except for the fact that they will *experientially* know their status). They will possibly (SF4) live through the entire length of the Millennium (but if not, see #4).
- (4) *If* saints die during the Millennium (presumably of extreme old age—they're still mortal, after all), their names would be found in the Lamb's Book of Life at the Great White Throne judgment (cf. Revelation 20:15), assuring their entrance into the everlasting life that awaits all of the redeemed. It's important to understand that no believer will be *judged* at the Great White Throne: their sins are already paid for. But mortals cannot enter the eternal state: the timing of the GWT and the final harvest of mortal saints must necessarily be very close together.
- (5) The last group of the saved are those believers among the mortal descendants of group (3) born during the Millennium. Still alive at the end of the thousand years, they will receive their immortal bodies at the close of the Millennium just as the Church-age Christians did at the rapture, moving seamlessly into a glorious eternity. Although it's never specifically named as such, I would call this the "second resurrection," in contrast to the event that occurred at the end of the Tribulation, called the "first resurrection" in Revelation 20:5-6. The believers of group (4), if there are any, will share in this second resurrection.
- (6) John reported at the beginning of the Millennium, **"The rest of the dead [i.e., the unsaved] did not live again until the thousand years were finished."** (Revelation 20:5) This includes the lost from the Old Testament period, the Church age, and through the end of the Tribulation. These are all consigned to Hades (I'll explain what this is later). The unbelievers who die during the Millennium will also share that fate, being held in Hades until they are called to face the Great White Throne judgment. There may

be some surprises in store for us as to precisely who is included here, but I must save the subject for another chapter.

- (7) The only possible group left are unbelieving mortals still alive at the end of the Millennium. It is quite possible, however (SF5), that they will *all* be killed in Magog II, the final un-battle. Thus, just as at the beginning of the Millennium, the only mortals on the planet at the very end are believers—i.e., group (5). If I'm wrong, they will be judged in their mortal bodies at the GWT. Their eternal outlook is the same either way. We aren't told which event will come first, the Great White Throne or the second resurrection. They seem to be more or less simultaneous. At any rate, it seems highly unlikely that any living mortal, saved or lost, will stand before the Judge who sits upon the Great White Throne, because from its description, no one could survive the encounter: even **"the earth and the heaven fled away"** from before His face. If any rebels survive Magog II, they'll find the reprieve short-lived.

Although Daniel was not given any insight as to the timing of these events, he did report the same basic facts: **"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever."** (Daniel 12:2-3) Note that he equates the "wise" with those who turn others to righteousness. They will shine "like the stars forever and ever," while their opposite number—those who led others away from God's truth—will suffer shame and eternal contempt. We are made in the image of God, and as such, we are designed to live forever. Where and with whom is our choice to make.

**"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."** (Revelation 20:14-15) That's it. No more waiting, no more maximum-security prisons for errant spirits. It's "the Great Divorce," the final separation of good from evil, of life from death, of right from wrong, of saved from lost—of those who chose to have a personal relationship with their Creator from those who choose not to. It is called the "second death" because it follows physical death, making permanent the process of separation that the first death merely initiated. Yahweh is holy, and all that He allows to inhabit His universe will be holy as well. All that is unholy must be consigned to a separate place, a place where He chooses not to go, and there's only one such venue in all of creation: the "lake of fire."

Paul puts the moment into perspective for us: **"Each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits [at His resurrection]; afterward those who are Christ's at His coming [at the rapture]. Then comes the end [okay, he skipped over a few steps here], when He**

**delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power....**" This admittedly sounds puzzling, because Yahshua and Yahweh are literally One. I think what Paul is getting at is that once Yahshua has defeated the last enemy—death, the curse itself—there will be no more reason to manifest Himself separately from "the Father," as He did during His first-century advent and will again during the Millennium. There will no longer be any reason for Yahshua to restrict Himself to the number of dimensions to which He was confined in His role as the Messiah. And as for us, once we are all given our sanctified, immortal, "spiritual" bodies, we will at last be able to commune with God *as Spirit* as naturally as we did when God appeared as the glorified Son of Man during the Millennium. As Paul concludes, **"For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."** (I Corinthians 15:23-27; cf. Psalm 8:6)

I don't exactly know how this will work, but death itself (along with the holding tank for the wicked dead, Hades) will be thrown into the lake of fire along with everything else unholy. So what *is* death, anyway? The Greek word used here is *thanatos*, defined in Thayer's Lexicon as "the death of the body, i.e., that separation of the soul from the body by which the life on earth is ended." The word is used in a wide variety of applications, including being personified, as Thayer says, as "a tyrant, subjugating men to his power and confining them in his dark domains." The Greek word for "dead" used in Revelation 20:13—"The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them"—is *nekros*, meaning "one that has breathed his last, lifeless, deceased, departed, one whose soul is in Hades, one destitute of life, without life, inanimate, destitute of force or power, inactive, or inoperative." (*Strong's*) *Nekros* seems to focus on the lifelessness of the corpse, while *thanatos* stresses the separation of the soul from the body. Both words were used in reference to Yahshua's death. Webster defines death as "the total and permanent cessation of all the vital functions of an animal or plant." That describes its effect, but doesn't really say what it is.

Is death necessarily bad? Most people would automatically say it is, but think about it. That air you're breathing: did Yahweh create it by snapping His fingers and saying "Let there be air" (which was certainly His prerogative) or did He employ millions of successive generations of photosynthetic algae during day number three of His creation week? The scientific evidence seems to solidly support the latter scenario. But if the former is true, why on earth did He create the algae? That soil you grow your tomatoes in: did God rough up the surface of "the third rock from the sun" the way a big league pitcher roughs up the surface of a baseball—or did He allow millions of generations of bacteria followed by successively higher forms of plant life (introduced in turn by the Divine Hand at the proper moment in Earth's history) to prepare the ground for our use? That

limestone façade on the county courthouse—or for that matter, the bedrock that Jerusalem itself is built upon (and built *of*): how did Yahweh make that stuff? It’s composed of calcium carbonate from the shells of trillions of aquatic animals—most of whom lived *and died* during the fifth “day” of creation. And consider the natural course of what happens when something *does* die. The corpse (whether animal or man) is immediately set upon by a succession of scavengers—microbes, egg-laying insects, birds, and sometimes the larger four-footed variety—that quickly and efficiently work on the carcass until there’s nothing left but a skeleton. Now consider this: if Yahweh hadn’t planned for physical death to be a part of the natural order of things, why did he create the clean-up crew?

Clearly, we need to rethink the whole concept of death. If Yahweh used it on such a grand scale to prepare the earth for our use (as seems to be the case from a scientific point of view), why does He Himself characterize it as a bad thing? What did He mean when He told Adam, **“Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”**? (Genesis 2:17) Adam did *not* die that day, not physically. His body lived on for 930 years! Notwithstanding the scriptural premise that one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day—making the prophecy true from God’s point of view—Yahweh obviously had some other definition of death in mind. And ponder this: how do you suppose Yahweh expected Adam to know what he meant about “death” if he had never seen anything die?

I’m going to go way out on a limb here and state my hypothesis, since we’re only given hints and clues in scripture. Feel free to disagree with me if you’ve got a better theory. I believe (SF7) that Adam *had* seen physical death (at least of mosquitoes, geraniums and such like), and Yahweh was using that experience to teach him a higher truth. The death that Adam was promised if he ate the forbidden fruit would do the same thing to his *spirit* that he had witnessed happening to the pretty but temporary flowers that he had seen wilt and die, or the mosquito that he himself had swatted.

To get to the bottom of this, we’re going to have to look closely at what the scriptures say about bodies, souls, and spirits—the three “dimensions” that define our human existence. We know what a body looks like, of course, and we’re familiar with the difference between a dead one and a live one. What makes a body “alive” is called a *nephesh*, which could be best described as a living soul—our consciousness. In the creation account, God said, **“Let the earth bring forth the living creature [*nephesh*] according to its kind, cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind.”** (Genesis 1:24) The account goes on to describe all kinds of animals as having—or *being*—*nephesh*: living souls. The word for “beast” here is misleading: it’s *chayah*, simply meaning “alive” or “living thing.” In addition to being descriptive of any living thing in God’s creation, *nephesh* also

means the inner self, what we'd call "the heart," that is, the essence of life, including thinking, feeling, willing, and desiring. It's the animate part of any living being; it exists until death. Thus the phrase *mapach nephesh* in Job 11:20 means: dying, the exhaling gasp of the soul from the body—the beginning of the state of no longer being alive.

Souls are not eternal (necessarily). They exist only as long as they are associated with their bodies. When Adam swatted the mosquito, the death he witnessed was a discontinuity—a separation of its soul—the *nephesh*—from its body. (I don't know what you'd call it in a plant, but there is apparently a "life force" that is either there or is not, defining whether the plant is alive or dead. There is an infinite difference between an organic substance and a living entity, and no amount of undirected energy input can get you from point A to point B.) I have a feeling that Adam understood that all of the living things around him were vulnerable to this kind of death. He also understood that the kind of life that was within him—his spiritual component—was fundamentally different from that of the animals over which he had been given dominion.

God had **"breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being."** (Genesis 2:7) This "breath of life" wasn't merely the kind of soul (*nephesh*) that animated the mosquito or the life force that inspired the geranium—it was the very essence of Yahweh. The word for "breath" here is the Hebrew *neshamah*. In addition to being the normal word for respiration, *neshamah* is also a figurative extension of breath: it represents the innermost part of a person that can respond to God. It is something that animals do not possess, indeed, something that fundamentally separates man from the animal kingdom. There's no single English word that captures what this is—probably because most of us don't even realize it exists. "Conscience" comes close, but it's more than that. Dogs have been known to display guilt, hiding and cringing from their masters even before their misdeeds have been discovered. (Cats, on the other hand, are either totally amoral or they just don't care what we think.) The *neshamah* is a sort of God-consciousness—the proverbial "God-shaped vacuum" that lies within man and can't be filled with anything other than Yahweh. It is the thing within us that allows us—that *requires* us—to be born anew, born spiritually from above, as Yahshua explained to Nicodemus in John 3.

But the *neshamah* is not in itself the spirit. There is a different Hebrew word for that: *ruach*. Based on the concept of wind (as *neshamah* is of breath) one's *ruach* is what makes him "alive" in the eternal sense. So just as our souls make our bodies alive, our spirits (provided we have been spiritually reborn) make our souls alive. The body is temporal and temporary; it's not built to last forever. A spirit, on the other hand, is eternal: once it exists, it cannot die. For a soul to live beyond the mortal body, it must be made alive—"quickened," in King James

parlance—by its spirit. And the vehicle by which the spirit inhabits the human soul is the *neshamah*—the “breath of God.”

Job’s young friend Elihu helps us get it straight by using both terms in the same sentence: **“But there is a spirit [*ruach*] in man, and the breath [*neshamah*] of the Almighty gives him understanding.”** (Job 32:8) The ultimate source of eternal life, then, is Yahweh’s Spirit. Real understanding is only possible if and when the Spirit of Yahweh has been “breathed” into him—the function of the *neshamah*. But make no mistake, the *neshamah* enables Yahweh’s Spirit to indwell us on an invitation-only basis.

Another passage using both words together sheds further light on the relationship between them. **“If He [Yahweh] should set His heart on it, if He should gather to Himself His Spirit [*ruach*] and His breath [*neshamah*], all [human] flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.”** (Job 34:14-15) Without God’s Spirit, mortal man is nothing but a body with a *nephesh*—a soul—which makes him a mere animal. But the *neshamah*, the “breath of God,” sets us apart from the animal world, enabling us to receive His *Ruach*, His Spirit. And that is what makes eternal life possible, for spirits, unlike souls, live forever.

As an interesting sidebar, both Hebrew words, *ruach* and *neshamah*, are feminine nouns. Our spiritual life is in fact the particular gift of our Heavenly Mother, God’s *Ruach Qodesh*, the Holy Spirit, bestowed upon us by our Heavenly Father, Yahweh. Now you know what God was really talking about when He wrote with His own finger in stone, **“Honor [or glorify—literally: make weighty] your Father and your Mother, that your days may be long upon the land which Yahweh your God is giving you.”** (Exodus 20:12) Yahweh designed the human family—father, mother, and child—to be a reflection of the structure of the very godhead. Yahweh, the “Father,” represents power, authority, the creative source. His *Ruach Qodesh* (the Holy Spirit), the “Mother,” represents God’s nurturing, protective side—the source of life. And the “Son,” Yahshua, symbolizes the One who represents His Father before the world—and especially before His adversaries. As Solomon says of a man’s children, **“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth.... They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with [Hebrew *dabar*: to declare, converse, command, promise, warn, or threaten] their enemies in the gate.”** (Psalm 127:4-5) God isn’t merely the Father—“He” is the whole family, so to speak. He is not “three persons” like the hymn says, but a complex unity: One God who manifests Himself on earth in *six* (not two) different ways (that He’s told us about). When Moses reports, **“Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one,”** (Deuteronomy 6:4) the word he used for “one” is *’echad*, meaning “that which is united as one in contrast to separate parts.” (From: *The Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*.)

Anyway, back to our subject. There is one really scary facet to the concept of eternal spiritual life: Yahweh is not the only spirit to whom we may be “reborn.” Satan and his demons are also spirits (though created ones), and it is possible to be born anew in *their* spirit as well. Note: though it should be obvious, it is physically impossible to have two mothers. One cannot be born of both Yahweh’s *Ruach Qodesh* and Satan’s spirit. You can be born of One or the other, but not of both. And as long as we’re being obvious, let me point out that it’s also possible not to have been born at all. These two facts have eternal ramifications we need to ponder—and we shall in our next chapter.

Was Adam “mortal” on the day he was created? I don’t know. A God powerful enough to form him from the dust of the ground (dust that He Himself had created) would have had no problem maintaining him in a state of perpetual perfection—suspending entropy, as it were. However, the death of which Yahweh warned Adam wasn’t merely physical; it was spiritual. If he ate the fruit of the no-no tree, the unique divine spirit that Yahweh had breathed into him would immediately die (in the sense of being separated from his soul—the concept the Greeks would have expressed as *thanatos*), even if his body—still alive by virtue of its *nephesh*—continued to walk around like some animal whose soul (*nephesh*) had never been endowed with a spirit in the first place. The gradual breakdown of Adam’s body—now mortal—would be allowed to take its course; entropy would no longer be held at bay by the divine hand, for Adam had by his disobedience said, “Go away, God.”

His spirit—that unique spark which Yahweh had breathed into him—was now dead, departed, separated from him. It had experienced “the total and permanent cessation of all its vital functions,” and hence could no longer commune with God as it once had. But Yahweh provided a way to reanimate the spirit He had breathed into Adam and Eve. Spiritually, if they wanted to *live* again, Adam and Eve would have to be *born* again. Though they didn’t understand what was going on, Yahweh had purposed to become a man Himself—imbued with the living Spirit of God as Adam had once been. And as a man, He would live a perfect, sinless life—at the conclusion of which He would offer Himself up as a sacrifice, paying the penalty for the transgression of Adam and Eve and all their descendants after them. As a prophetic demonstration of what He would accomplish some 4,000 years later, Yahweh killed (by separating its body from its soul) an innocent animal—a picture of the promised Messiah—and made clothing from its skin for His fallen companions. This covering is a prototype for the “**fine linen, clean and bright...the righteous acts of the saints**” in which the Bride of Christ was arrayed in Revelation 19:8.

At this point, Adam and Eve had a choice to make, the same choice all of us have. They *knew* they were guilty. They had already tried to “work” their way

back to God by sewing fig leaves together in an unsuccessful attempt to hide their sin—not from each other, but from God. Yahweh, of course, had seen right through it. Now, they could either accept the new clothes and put on the imputed righteousness provided through the sacrifice, or refuse the gift, opting to walk around in their shame. They chose wisely. Not all of their children did.

So what is God talking about when He tells us that death will be destroyed? I believe He is referring specifically to spiritual death, the separation of the spirit from the soul. Once the last human has chosen to love Yahweh or reject Him, once all of redeemed mankind has been “clothed” in their immortal resurrection bodies, the very concept of their separation from God will be rendered impossible: Yahweh will have destroyed death. **“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity [for death] is hidden from My eyes.”** (Hosea 13:14)

Yahshua put it in even clearer terms for us, just before he demonstrated His power over the grave by raising a man back to life who had been dead for four days. In John 11:25-26 He told the man’s sister, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”** Words to *live* by.

## Chapter 29

### The Three Doors

“Imagine there’s no heaven. It’s easy if you try. No hell below us, above us only sky....” John Lennon voiced the astonishing dream of fallen man, who wants so desperately for there to be “no hell below us” that he’s willing to give up heaven itself to be rid of it. Although he probably didn’t know it, Lennon got two things right: a vivid imagination is required for man to suppress the dread of hell and the hope of heaven that Yahweh placed within our souls; and once sin entered the world, heaven and hell became two sides of the same coin—one can’t exist without the other. Someone once quipped that the little-known last verse of the song—the one he wrote *after* his untimely death—began: “Oops....”

Hell, of course, is no laughing matter, though many scoff at its very existence. In truth, it isn’t hard to see why. There are a thousand conflicting traditions about what the “afterlife” is—if it exists at all—and half of ’em are derived, at some level, from the Bible itself. Part of the problem is that no one who has ever been there (whether a place or a state) has ever come back and told us about it. The Apostles’ Creed states: “He descended into hell...He ascended into heaven...” but there is no universal agreement about what those terms—heaven and hell—mean (and the Creed isn’t inspired scripture anyway). More to the point, Yahshua didn’t come back and say, *Hey guys, guess what I found out....*

The problem is compounded because the words used in scripture to describe the afterlife are themselves laden with cultural baggage—concepts which are not necessarily factual. However, they were the only words available, whether in Greek or Hebrew, that would have conveyed even approximately the meaning Yahweh intended. (He could have simply made up new words, I suppose—like Muhammad often did—but that wouldn’t have helped matters unless he had also provided a lexicon of some sort. He wisely opted to avoid that particular can of worms.) Another problem: the English words used to convey the Greek and Hebrew concepts are often anemic, misleading shadows of what was actually conveyed in the original texts. Further, several millennia of speculation by imaginative humans has only muddied the waters: we need to remember that Plato, Augustine, Dante Alighieri—and Gary Larson, for that matter—were only guessing.

It is instructive to examine the *why* of it. Why did Yahweh provide us with so little definitive information about the afterlife? Why did His apostles and prophets use common words that of necessity came laden with speculative traditions and errant cultural connotations? I think it has to do with motivation. Yahweh created us to love Him, or more correctly, to reciprocate His love toward us. But as we

know, love is not something that can be forced or mandated: it must be offered freely, or it isn't love at all. So by definition, heaven can't be the payoff for a celestial bribe. I have a feeling that if Yahweh had told us what heaven is really like, we'd be "loving" Him just to get in the door—having fellowship with our Creator would be seen as a byproduct of heaven, not the other way around. (Or worse, it would be perceived as heaven's price of admission.) In the same way, if we really knew what hell was like, I'm pretty sure we'd all do *anything*—even cozy up to a God we didn't particularly care about—to avoid the place. But Yahweh didn't make heaven as an inducement or hell as a threat. Eternal life isn't a reward for being good, nor is death (necessarily) the punishment for being naughty. God wasn't even *thinking* about man when he constructed hell—it was built to house rebellious spirits. Life and death are merely the natural and inevitable consequences of a far more weighty matter: what we choose to do with Yahweh's love.

So God didn't tell us very much about the precise nature of the afterlife. Exacerbating our ignorance today, our English Bible versions are invariably slanted to reflect the preconceived notions of the translators. For example, the KJV often translates the same Hebrew word, *sheol*, as "the grave" when talking about good people but "hell" when talking about bad people. This adds a layer of complexity to the concept that just isn't there in the original. That's not to say the subject of what happens after death isn't complex. Isaiah, for instance, voices two seemingly contradictory statements within a few sentences of each other: first he proclaims—**"They are dead, they will not live; they are deceased, they will not rise. Therefore You have punished and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish."** (Isaiah 26:14) Then in practically the same breath he says, **"Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead."** (Isaiah 26:19) He's saying that those who belong to Yahweh will be resurrected to a state of eternal bliss (something worth singing about), while those who troubled Israel (the subject of verse 14) will not. But does that mean that these people have received all the punishment that's coming to them when they die? Will their souls "sleep" or be annihilated? Will (or can) those who align themselves against Yahweh's interests get off scot free? This would not only fly in the face of two millennia's worth of serious Biblical exegesis on the subject, it seems to flatly contradict all of those familiar passages that clearly speak of eternal torment, of everlasting punishment for the wicked. Why was Yahweh said to have "punished" *and* "destroyed" them? What's happening here?

Only by examining the words of scripture can we come to a knowledge of the truth. But I'll warn you right up front. What you are about to discover may not mesh with your religious perceptions and traditions. If you're like me, you've been taught all your life that there are only two possible eternal destinations: a

heaven for the saved in which everything is beautiful and good, and a hell filled with eternal torments for the damned. Most Christians are vaguely aware of a few nagging logistical glitches in this theory, but we tend to sweep them under the mental rug, preferring not to deal with them. A couple of extreme examples will bring the problem into focus: what happens to aborted fetuses? And what is the fate of the children of lost parents (Muslims, atheists, pagans, etc.) who die in infancy? They didn't choose Yahweh (and if the cultural statistics are reliable, probably wouldn't have, even given the opportunity) so it's not really appropriate to "force" them to spend eternity in an intimate, familial fellowship with Him. But neither did they reject Yahweh in favor of Satan, so it seems harsh, unfair—even cruel—to consign them to the eternal torments of hell. Is the exercise of one's choice the spiritual Rubicon? Truth be known, *most* people never make a conscious and deliberate choice.

Christians normally deal with such conundrums by appealing to human logic (instead of scouring the scriptures for answers, as they should). Many appeal to something called an "age of accountability," prior to which no one is held accountable for their sins, nor does the Adamic sin nature Paul talked about play any role. Some would place this "age" later in life, say in one's teens. Others envisioning toddlers crossing the line. My own pastor jokingly envisions it to be that magic moment when little kids all of a sudden become embarrassed about running around the house butt naked after taking their baths. I suppose that's as good a definition as any, except for one slight glitch: scripture doesn't mention or support the concept of a get-out-of-jail-free age of accountability. It's a theory that has no scriptural support whatsoever. There *is* mention of children being accounted "holy" by virtue of the faith of a believing parent (I Corinthians 7:14), but that's different. It does nothing to address the puzzle of "non-choosers" being either forced to live eternally with Yahweh, or conversely, being sent to a place of everlasting torment because of their ignorance, apathy, or bad luck.

The idea of purgatory doesn't help, either. There is absolutely no scriptural basis for it, since it puts people in the place of God (making atonement for their own sins or the sins of their loved ones) and it makes works—not grace—the mechanism that purges us of our sins. The concept of purgatory, however, has a history that predates Constantine (under whose influence Christian doctrine began to fall apart in earnest), a history that suggests that the early Church fathers were even then struggling with the inadequacies of the two-doors-to-eternity theory—a theory that makes it impossible to reconcile God's infinite mercy with His perfect justice.

Thus the idea of postmortem penance was posited by Clement of Alexandria as early as 202 A.D. and by Tertullian about 210. Following their lead, Augustine, in the fourth century, wrote, "Temporal punishments are suffered by some in this

life only, by some after death, by some both here and hereafter, but all of them before that last and strictest judgment. *But not all who suffer temporal punishments after death will come to eternal punishments*, which are to follow after that judgment.” (Italics mine.) Augustine quite rightly couldn’t conceive of how a loving God could allow those who were merely weak or misled to suffer eternal torment, but he wisely perceived that God couldn’t admit them into fellowship with Him in their sinful state, either. His man-made solution to this conundrum, however, was completely erroneous—*de facto* characterizing Yahweh as a capricious sadist. Nevertheless, purgatory became a cornerstone of Roman Catholic soteriology under Pope Gregory I late in the sixth century. Only later did the church figure out how to make a buck out of it, selling the “indulgences” that eventually helped precipitate the Protestant Reformation.

Although the “bliss or torture” teaching that led the Catholic Church into such illogical error was carried over as a mainstay of Protestant Christian dogma, the Protestants (unlike the Catholics) have *never* offered a plausible explanation for their God’s seemingly erratic and inconsistent behavior. Christians today seem content to wallow in wilfull ignorance every time they encounter something uncomfortable or inconvenient about their God—or more properly, about their cherished traditions and beliefs concerning Him. But as we’re about to see, the answer is everywhere you look—an answer that proves Yahweh to be the very merciful, just, and loving Father He purports to be. To see the answer, however, we must be willing to look at scripture with fresh eyes. We need to stop seeing things through the cataracts of traditional religious dogma, and begin to examine and embrace the actual words of scripture. They can lead us to some stunning and awe-inspiring truths.

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Let’s begin by revisiting a parable through which Yahshua described His kingdom: **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind [literally: family], which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”** (Matthew 13:47-50) It’s disturbing enough to find that “bad fish” are swimming with the “good” ones, though we saw this very thing in the parables of the mustard seed and the wheat and tares. These “bad fish” can even be found within the nominal church, as Yahshua made all too obvious in His seven letters in Revelation 2 and 3.

But there's more here than meets the eye. A subtle differentiation between two types of "bad fish" in this passage is totally lost in the English, a distinction that is important to our understanding of mankind's prospective eternal destinies. The fish that were characterized as "bad" are simply "thrown away." By contrast, "wicked" fish are "cast into the furnace of fire" where there will be "wailing and gnashing of teeth." We ordinarily assume these are the same souls, but I believe they're not. The word translated "bad" is the Greek *sapros*. It means rotten and decayed, putrefied, decomposed, thus unfit and worthless. A fish that is *sapros* is dead, and judging by the stench, has been for some time. "Wicked," on the other hand, is the Greek word *poneros*, meaning one causing pain, peril, and trouble, someone who is diseased, malignant, seriously faulty, evil, morally corrupt, vicious, even one who derives his wickedness from supernatural evil powers. Fish that are *poneros* are very much alive—and they're dangerous. Thus there are not two but *three* kinds of fish: the good, the lifeless, and the evil. And there are three corresponding potential destinies: (1) eternal life with Yahweh (a very good thing), (2) death (a bad thing), and (3) everlasting punishment like that reserved for Satan and his demons (something infinitely worse than bad). That may come as a shock, but as we'll soon learn, it's a theme that's as ubiquitous in scripture as it is hard for us to see.

In a way, this subject is a little like man's perception of the advents of the Messiah. In the first century, everybody *knew* that God's Anointed One would come and fulfill all the Messianic prophecies all at once—reigning in glory and subduing Israel's enemies. When the devout Simeon encountered the infant Yahshua, he referred to Him (as Isaiah had) as "A light to bring revelation to the gentiles *and* the glory of Yahweh's people Israel." But we're still waiting for the second half of that, in case you haven't noticed. Some Jews of the time were vaguely aware of some "suffering servant" passages, but they misapplied them or simply ignored their significance because they were upsetting and inconvenient to their tidy little theologies. The idea that the prophecies could be fulfilled in two different advents separated by thousands of years occurred to practically no one. What's more, Yahshua didn't bother correcting our misperceptions; He gave us only the information we needed to live our lives day by day in reliance upon Him.

In the same way today, our common Christian perceptions of the afterlife may be based on incomplete or partially understood information. A casual reading (in English) of any number of scripture passages on the subject (like the one we just read) *seem* to indicate a simple choice between two alternatives, eternal life and eternal death. But how is this death defined? Sometimes death is characterized as eternal anguish, torment, a sharing in the everlasting punishment of the devil and his angels. On the other hand, it is far more often described as the destruction of the soul—a total cessation of life on the sub-corporeal level. And it occurs to very few of us that these are mutually exclusive concepts. Dead people feel no pain

and suffer no anguish. For the words of scripture to have any meaning at all, there must be *three* possible doors—not just two—through which men may pass after physical death: eternal life, annihilation of the soul, and eternal conscious torment.

Examining a few examples under the microscope will help us clarify the distinction. **“You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.”** (Isaiah 38:17) The Hebrew word for “corruption” is *beliy*, which actually means nothingness—it is the word for negation, literally: “no, not, or without.” Isaiah (actually, the quote is from King Hezekiah) is saying that by placing our sins out of His sight, Yahweh has saved our souls from *becoming nothing*, from dissipating into nonexistence. He’s quite clearly describing door number two. (At least it’s clear in the Hebrew—it’s as fuzzy as a spring lamb in the English).

Or try this: **“He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”** (Galatians 6:8) Here in the Renewed Covenant, the word “corruption” is rendered from the word *phthora*, meaning the destruction that is characterized by decay, moral corruption, or depravity—sort of like the “bad” (*sapros*) fish we saw in Matthew 13. Paul’s point is well taken: if one lives only to please his flesh, his destiny will be in kind. The body dies, decays, and returns to dust—a metaphor for what will happen to his soul. Again, door number two is being described. There is no mention here of divine retribution or wrath; God is not even said to be angry or upset. Corruption is merely the natural, inevitable result of choosing to live like a spiritless animal.

Let’s check in with Peter. **“The heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”** (II Peter 3:7) For our present discussion, we need to look hard at two words in this verse, translated “judgment” and “perdition.” Judgment is from the Greek *krisis*, meaning a separation, sundering, or selection. Perdition (*apoleia*) means ruin, waste, loss, utter and eternal devastation—with the emphasis on *eternal*. (Try to remember these Greek words. We’ll run into them again.) So ungodly men are going to be “separated” *and* undergo eternal ruin. As we’ll see later in more detail, this “separation” is not necessarily between good and evil, but can be between the “ungodly” and the *anti-godly*. Those assigned to *krisis*—mere separation—are lost, but they aren’t necessarily damned to eternal torment in hell. *Krisis* can lead to either door number two or door number three.

Bildad prophesied in the book of Job: **“Those who hate you [in context, who hate the one who is blameless before God, a man of integrity] will be clothed with shame, and the dwelling place of the wicked will come to nothing.”** (Job 8:22) Here I believe we have a subtle comparison between doors number two and three. The Hebrew word for “shame” is *boset*, meaning shame, disgrace, or humiliation. The *Theological*

*Wordbook of the Old Testament* reports that its root *bos* “expresses that sense of confusion, embarrassment and dismay when matters turn out contrary to one’s expectations,” as well as “the disgrace which is the result of defeat at the hands of an enemy.... Involved here are all the nuances of confusion, disillusionment, humiliation, and brokenness which the word connotes.” But then in contrast, Bildad turns around and says (in literal terms), “the home or habitation—the tent—of the guilty—those declared to be in violation of a standard of law—will *not be*.” This last word is *'ayin*, meaning “nothing, none, or naught,” from a root connoting “to be nothing or not to exist.” Once again, we see the dichotomy between the dead and the damned: the enemies of Yahweh and His children will suffer shame and humiliation—things that require life and existence—while the merely “guilty” will cease to exist at all.

Yahshua once asked one of the most significant questions of all time: “**What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?**” (Luke 9:25) Why were two separate negative contingencies listed? Because two distinct destinies were possible for the lost. The word translated “destroyed” is from *apollumi*, meaning to destroy, ruin, lose, disappear, cease to exist, fail to get, or die. We should now be able to recognize this as door number two. And the contrasting word, *zemioo*? It means to sustain damage, receive injury, suffer loss, forfeit, or undergo punishment. No destruction, disappearance, or death is possible here: *zemioo* requires one to be extant and conscious of his situation: it’s door number three. The amazing thing about all this (at least to me) is how Yahweh can say something so many times in so many ways and we still don’t get it: there are *three* post-mortal destinations—life, death, or damnation. The default is death; we must *choose* to receive either eternal life or everlasting damnation.

In the context of the Last Days, that fact makes these next two passages really scary. First, “**If anyone worships the beast [that is, the Antichrist or the demon who inhabits him] and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.**” (Revelation 14:9-11) That warning applies to everyone alive on earth during the last half of the Tribulation, when, as you’ll recall, the “mark of the beast” will be instituted as a sign of submission to the Antichrist and his Satanic world government. In order to avoid door number three, people will have to become outlaws, fugitives, rebels against the system. Many will pay for their convictions with their lives—a small price to pay, however, for avoiding eternal torment and (as they place their faith in the Living God) gaining everlasting life.

Second, Yahshua explained what will happen to those left alive at the end of the Tribulation. They will be separated as a herdsman separates his sheep from the goats. **“And these [the “goats”] will go away into everlasting punishment [*kolasis*], but the righteous [that is, the “sheep”] into eternal life.”** (Matthew 25:46) Why is this so terrifying? Because He has apparently ruled out non-choice (leading to door number two) as an option for these last hardy survivors. I realize it’s an argument from silence which makes it hard to be dogmatic, but it appears that by the time the King takes His throne, no one on earth will still be sitting on the fence trying to ignore the world of spiritual things. No one will be “merely wicked” anymore, marked for destruction. If by this time you haven’t chosen to reciprocate Yahweh’s love, then you will be counted as His enemy, actively engaged in the futile work of Satan. Your fate is *kolasis*: punishment or penalty, from a verb meaning to lop off or prune, hence to curb, check, restrain, or chastise.

You won’t have to be a theologian or serious student of “religious things” to demonstrate your choice, however. Your decision will be evident in how you treat Yahweh’s people—especially the Jews—during this time of testing. Bless them and God will bless you. Curse them, and you’re on your way through door number three. That principle will have been in force for four thousand years at this point, proven at every turn to be true, if only we’d pay attention to the consequences of our actions. You’d think we’d have gotten the hint.

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One thing we need to be clear on from the outset: God considers the doctrine of the afterlife basic and foundational: **“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”** (Hebrews 6:1-2) In other words, these are baseline truths—(1) that your good works can’t save you—rather, you must rely upon God’s saving grace; (2) that our baptism in water is a demonstration of our acceptance of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection as payment for our sin, and that our subsequent immersion in His Holy Spirit is the essence of the Christian walk; and (3) the point germane to our present study, that there is such a thing as life after death—whether for good or ill—in addition to what we witness with our own eyes, physical death. If you don’t comprehend these fundamental doctrines, you will have trouble understanding anything about God’s plan for your life.

The writer of Hebrews didn’t specifically point out the second of the three doors—destruction of the soul—because he was teaching about the “elementary

principles of Christ,” one of which is life after death. This points out one reason the doctrine of the three doors is so hard for us to comprehend: the scriptures rarely mention all three “doors” in the same passage. The parable of the dragnet we saw above is an exception, and we can only see it there if we get into the Greek. Most of the time eternal life is contrasted with only one of the two possible alternatives: death, destruction, annihilation and dissipation on the one hand, or on the other, eternal waking participation in Satan’s well-deserved torment. And if we’re not paying attention, the two things (since both of them are bad) can sound quite similar.

The idea that the righteous dead could live again was nothing new. In the Bible’s oldest book, Job in his distress looks forward to his own bodily resurrection. **“Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands.”** (Job 14:13-15) The insight Yahweh gave Job is obscure in the English, so it may be helpful to look at a few of the Hebrew words. To “hide” (Hebrew: *tsaphan*) is not merely to keep something out of sight (as in the parallel “conceal”—*sathar*) but to store up, to treasure, to put away for safe-keeping. Believers who have perished are thus like “buried treasure” to Yahweh, and He plans to someday come back and dig up what’s His. Then Job asks, **“If a man dies, shall he live again?”** “Live” is the Hebrew word *chayah*. It means “to live, to have life, remain alive, sustain life, live prosperously, live for ever, be quickened, be alive, or be restored to life or health.” (*Strong’s*) It’s a rhetorical question with a surprising answer: Yes, he can.

Job was looking forward to lying peacefully in his grave awaiting a transformation. The “change” of which he speaks is the Hebrew *chaliyphah*, the same word used of a change of clothing or a changing of the guard. At its root it means to replace or succeed—hence it is the root of the Arabic word “Caliph,” a ruler who has succeeded or replaced a former one. In the same way the word is used of the second or “replacement” growth that arises from the stump of a tree that has been cut down. This is certainly the picture Job had in mind, for just before this he had been comparing the fortitude and resilience of a tree with the apparent frailty of man: **“For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its tender shoots will not cease. Though its root may grow old in the earth, and its stump may die in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and bring forth branches like a plant. But man dies and is laid away; Indeed he breathes his last and where is he?”** (Job 14:7-10) As Job mulled over his predicament as a mortal, Yahweh revealed to him that though he may be cut down like a diseased tree, his roots, firmly planted in God, will someday cause him to “change,” to grow into a new tree—different from the original and yet anchored and sustained by the very

same roots—Yahweh Himself. (As singer/songwriter Keith Green once phrased it, “He is divine, and we are de branch.”) Job is describing bodily resurrection.

A few chapters later, Job has arrived at an even clearer picture of what’s in store for him in eternity. **“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth. And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”** (Job 19:25-27) Again, physical bodily resurrection and restoration is in view, a concept that is abundantly clear in the Hebrew. (If you’ll recall, we discussed these new, immortal bodies and how they’ll differ from our present ones back in chapter 8—our introduction to the rapture.) Notice Job’s emphasis on vision here. The Hebrew word for “eye” is *ayin*, of which the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* says, “More than the eye itself is implied by this word. Occasionally it represents the whole process of seeing and by extension, of understanding and obedience.... The eye is used to express knowledge, character, attitude, inclination, opinion, passion, and response. The eye is a good barometer of the inner thoughts of man.”

Keeping this in mind, the first instance of “see” in this passage, as well as the word translated “behold,” are the Hebrew word *chazah*, meaning not only the ordinary bodily perception of sight (to look, observe, or gaze), but also to see visions or prophecy—to receive information from God. The word connotes selection or preference—to choose one object over another using the faculty of sight as a means of differentiating between them. Thus to “see” God in Job’s parlance is to perceive what Yahweh has in store for His people, to use the perceptive abilities He gave us to distinguish between the world’s error and God’s truth. It is the essence of God’s primary gift to us: choice.

The phrase “and not another” doesn’t come across in the English. “Another” is the Hebrew term *zuwr*, meaning a stranger, a foreigner, an enemy—even a prostitute (in the sense of being a woman “strange” to you). Job is saying that whereas *he* will “see God” in the afterlife, those who are strangers to Him will not. His heart yearns within him for this vision—especially since Yahweh is so hard to see with mortal eyes—but those who are His enemies, those who give their affections to other gods, couldn’t care less. They won’t “see God” because they’re not looking for Him.

This is one of hundreds of places in scripture where “door number one”—eternal life—is contrasted with the alternative but it’s not terribly clear what that alternative is. It’s not too surprising that our conception of “hell,” in the sense of being the opposite of “heaven” (terms I’ll define in the next chapter), is shaped by the relatively few passages that unmistakably speak of eternal torment. But this one requires no such interpretation. All it says is “people who are strangers to Yahweh won’t perceive Him.” For this, and for the vast majority of “afterlife”

passages, door number two—annihilation of the soul—makes far more sense. Once we come to terms with the concept that there are actually three doors, we'll start to see a whole new dimension to God's mercy—and justice. In the end, He'll give us precisely what we asked for; and even if we ask for nothing, we'll receive that. Before we're through, we'll have a pretty good handle on the specific factors that separate door number two from door number three—that differentiate death from a fate infinitely worse. But first, let's review another few examples that will help clarify door number one: eternal life in the presence of our God.

Paul refers to a passage we saw earlier in this chapter: **“All things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He [Yahweh] says: ‘Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead,’ and Christ will give you light.”** (Ephesians 5:14) This, of course, reminds us of the vision, the ability to “see God,” for which Job yearned. The Apostle was alluding to Isaiah's proclamation that we looked at a little while ago: **“Your dead shall live; Together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust. For your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”** (Isaiah 26:19) Paul caught it, though the translators didn't: the “My” in “my dead body” should be capitalized—this is in Yahweh's voice. The redeemed will arise with (or as a result of) *Yahshua's* “dead body.” Because He conquered death, so too will those indwelt with His Spirit awaken from their mortal state.

Like a lawyer making his case, Yahshua appealed to Moses to demonstrate that the righteous dead will arise: **“Even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called Yahweh ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.”** (Luke 20:37-38) Notice that He listed only “saved” people here. When Yahshua declared that *“all live to Him,”* He was referring to all of those to whom He has given life. The word for “living” and “live” (Greek: *zao*) has a decidedly positive connotation in the original: *zao* is not just alive, but vital, blessed, vigorous, efficacious. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are (because they are imbued with Yahweh's Spirit) alive to Him, even though their bodies died thousands of years ago. In context, Yahshua was explaining the concept of door number one—resurrection to eternal life for Yahweh's children—to a group of Sadducees who didn't believe it was possible. We usually get so excited about that, we miss the converse: He is *not* the God of the dead. The dead—those headed for door number two have no God, real or false. They have no permanent existence whatsoever.

If you'll allow me to speculate for a moment, I'd like to take this argument one step further. It seems to be implying that those who have chosen door number three—association with Satan's spirit—are in a real pickle. Because they are “living” and “all (who are living) live to Him,” then Yahweh, not Satan, is not

only God, He is *their* God. But because they have chosen Satan's fate, they have no access to, nor comfort from, Yahweh. Satan can't help them (not that he wants to), and Yahweh refuses to overrule, even now, the disastrous choice they've made. So those of door number three are stuck knowing *about* God but having no relationship or contact with Him. Knowing you've missed the boat is far more painful than not knowing the boat exists. The living dead of the third door are (as they say in theological parlance) *screwed*.

John's first epistle used some rather provocative turns of phrase: **"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren."** (I John 3:14) John isn't waxing poetic (or stupid) here. We haven't passed from *nekros* to *bios*—transformed from being a lifeless corpse into having a "living soul," something possessed by any garden slug. Rather, the apostle says that we've passed from *thanatos* to *zoe*—from the lifeless state of being separated from Yahweh's Spirit to a condition of abundant, essential, and permanent vitality and animation.

But then he discusses the alternative: **"He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."** (I John 3:14-15) Now there's an interesting way to put it: "abides in death" (again, *thanatos*). The original Greek renders it as somewhat less of an oxymoron. "Abides" is *meno*, which according to *Strong's* means: "to remain, to abide. In reference to place: to sojourn or tarry, not to depart, to continue to be present, to be held or kept continually. In reference to time: to continue to be, not to perish, to last or endure. Of persons: to survive, to live. In reference to state or condition, to remain as one, not to become another or different." Ponder that definition: it's a perfect picture of the third door—to live in death, to survive in separation. The dead ought to at least "rest in peace." Those of the third door cannot: they are what you might call spiritual zombies—the undead.

Since that's a bad thing, we should examine what puts somebody in this state. John says it's being a "murderer." Is he saying that killers can't repent of their sins? Is murder an unforgivable offense? No. This particular word (*anthropoktonos*) is used only three times in scripture, two of them right here. So it behooves us to look closely at the third. It was used when Yahshua was lambasting the Pharisees for their disastrous spiritual affiliation: **"If God were your Father [as you claim], you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer [*anthropoktonos*] from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do**

**you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.**" (John 8:42-47) Okay. Now we're getting somewhere. The horrors of the third door are not reserved for someone who has merely taken a mortal life—a common manslayer—but specifically for one who, in his role as a child of Satan, has prevented others from having a life-giving relationship with Yahweh. (Of course, one who has died can no longer make choices, good *or* bad, so in certain circumstances, ordinary murder *precipitates* spiritual murder.) But technically, it is their alignment with—their “rebirth” in—the spirit of Satan, the father of murder and lies, that condemns them. As John reminds us, our very first historical record of Satan tells of his tempting Adam and Eve to betray Yahweh. His success defined him as a murderer, an *anthropoktonos*, not separating a man's soul from his body, but separating God's Spirit from his soul.

This brings into sharp focus the underlying significance of the sixth commandment: **“You shall not murder.”** (Exodus 20:13) Yahweh has once again used an illustration in the physical realm (in this case, murder—the malicious and purposeful separation of someone's soul from his body) to demonstrate the far more serious spiritual principle that underlies it: You shall not be a party to the separation of Yahweh's spirit from a person's soul—this is spiritual murder. And as John points out, murderers of this sort will “abide in death.” It bears mention also that in the Torah, *attempted* murder was punished as if the deed had been successful. One does not get “bonus points” for being inept at perpetrating evil.

Later in the same passage in which Yahshua defined the kind of “murder” that would indicate alliance with Satan, He outlined the path to eternal life. He said, **“Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”** (John 8:51) He's speaking about spiritual death, of course, so the word he uses for “death” is *thanatos*, not *nekros*. According to this verse, then, we need to understand what it is to “keep Yahshua's word.” The Greek word for “keep” is *tereo*, which means to attend to carefully, to guard, to observe, to keep in view. We saw it used in Revelation 3:10, where those believers who had “kept” Yahshua's command (*logos*) to persevere were assured that they in turn would be “kept” out of the coming hour of trial—the Tribulation. *Tereo* is the word used in both places. The word for “word” is *logos*, which was also employed in Revelation 3:10. *Logos* means a word or speech embodying a concept or idea, especially a declaration from God; thus it is not surprising to find the Word being used to describe Yahshua the Messiah in the first chapter of John's Gospel. To “keep Yahshua's word,” then, is to carefully pay attention to, observe, and take seriously the things that Yahweh has done and said—the foremost of which is the life and mission of the Messiah, Yahshua.

And what does it mean to “see” spiritual death? The Greek *theoreo* does not mean “to experience,” as we might expect. The truth here is even more

astonishing. *Theoreo* means to look at or behold, to perceive—whether with the eyes or merely as a mental picture; to discern or consider. We are being told here that if we “keep Yahshua’s word,” we will be so far removed from *thanatos*, we won’t even be able to conjure up a mental image of what it would be like to be separated from Yahweh’s Spirit.

John’s first epistle puts the same truth into slightly different terms. He writes, **“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”** (I John 5:11-13) John is not talking about the kind of life (*bios*) we share with garden slugs by virtue of our *nephesh*, or souls. The word (as we have come to expect) is *zoe*, animated, active, vigorous and essential life—a word used in the New Testament as a technical description of a believer’s spiritual state in Yahweh.

We all know who the “Son of God” is, but what does it mean to “have” Him? In Greek, the word is *echo*, meaning to have, hold, keep, or possess. One is said to “have” the clothes he wears, property, riches, or his spouse, or “have” an opinion, emotions, or a worried mind; the word is even “used of those joined to anyone by the bonds of natural blood or marriage, of friendship, duty or law, or of attendance or companionship.” (*Strong’s*) To “have the Son of God,” then, is to hold onto Him, possess Him, join yourself to Him, clinging to Him through bonds of blood (His sacrifice allows us to relate to Him as our Father); marriage (His called-out assembly—the *Ekklesia*—is His bride); friendship (there is no greater love than His laying down His life for us); duty (not to Him but to our own souls—the duty of self-preservation); and law (the Torah speaks of Yahweh’s salvation—Yahshua—between every line).

By the way, that phrase in verse 13 **“that you may know that you have eternal life,”** is mistranslated (though it’s no doubt true anyway). It literally says that John had written these things so that we could **“be related (by blood) to, be devoted to or an adherent of, and be of the household or brotherhood of** [all of that is inherent in the meaning of the Greek word *oikeios*] **the eternal life you possess.”** We can “know” our eternal status as we know our spouses or children—intimately, devotedly, and permanently. If you work this stuff out in the original Greek or Hebrew, all of the doubt and trepidation that permeate our English versions completely disappear. All that’s left is joyful confidence in our eternal destiny—*if* we “have the Son of God,” that is.

Yahshua put it like this, a statement no less astounding for all its clarity: **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”**

**Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.** “Hear” is the Greek *akoustos*—the rough equivalent of the Hebrew *shema*: to hear, receive news, listen, pay attention to, understand, and obey. **“For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”** (John 5:24-29)

Who are “all who are in the graves?” In the English, it seems to mean “everyone who has died,” but the Greek doesn’t necessarily support that view. The word for “graves” here is *mneneion*, which *Strong’s* defines as “any visible object for preserving or recalling the memory of a person or thing; a memorial or monument, specifically, a sepulchral monument.” What’s being stressed in the choice of this word is not death, but rather the *memory* of the deceased. If the souls without a spirit are simply annihilated upon the death of the body, then this dual resurrection to which Yahshua is referring—to either life or condemnation—will include only those souls who are indwelt with an immortal spirit, whether Yahweh’s or Satan’s. The dead of door number two, in contrast, are *not* marked for resurrection; they are not “remembered.” They are simply dead. They never passed “from death into life.” They were spiritually stillborn. They never *were*. That being said, they *will* (in a sense) be resurrected at the Great White Throne in order to face the final judgment—the sorting out of who will join Satan in eternal torment and who will simply cease to be. More on that in a bit.

Though we could continue *ad nauseum*, I think the point is now abundantly clear: everlasting life awaits Yahweh’s children. I’ll give Daniel the last word on door number one. What he reports is, not surprisingly, very similar to what we just heard from Yahshua. **“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.”** (Daniel 12:2-3) The contrast between being asleep and awake is quite picturesque in the original Hebrew. *Yasen* is the ordinary word for sleep, though it is clearly being used here as a euphemism for physical death. But it is a death we are *designed* to awaken from: the word “awake” (the Hebrew *qayits*) actually means “summer” (though it’s translated “awake” or something similar about half the time). This picture is like the view out the window of my study. At the moment, everything I can see is bleak and “dead”—gray-brown tree trunks and leafless, apparently lifeless, twiggy underbrush. But in a couple of months (I know from experience) I will see instead a lush, verdant forest, bright with new growth—poplars and maples, walnuts and oaks, each with its own unique take on life. What will have happened? A miracle?

Not really. Just an annual preview from our Creator of what's supposed to happen to us: when the summer comes, we will have fully awakened from the death of winter.

But Daniel speaks of *two* groups who are to awaken. For the first group, summer's awakening brings *'owlam chayah*, literally, eternal life, restoration, and revival. This, of course, is what we've been calling door number one. The group set in contrast with them here will also awaken with the "summer," but like the weeds that are sure to sprout in my wife's garden, they will awaken to "shame and everlasting contempt." That's *cherpah*: reproach, scorn, taunting, and disgrace; and *'owlam deraown*—everlasting abhorrence, aversion, and repulsion.

These are meaningless concepts to the dead. They instead describe those who have "awakened," doors number one and three. But notice that Daniel doesn't say that *all* will awaken—only "many." (There is a perfectly good word in Hebrew for "all", and this isn't it.) He has thus indicated the existence of a third group: those who, though they too "sleep in the dust," will not awaken to either glory or shame, but will simply remain asleep: they are the extinguished souls of door number two.

When Daniel says that those who are wise (*sakal*: prudent, circumspect, having understanding) will "shine," he's really saying that they will teach, warn, and admonish, for that's what the Hebrew *zahar*—to be or send out light—really means. The effect or outcome of this illumination is the turning of many to "righteousness," that is, *tsadaq*—vindication, justification, being declared right or innocent before Yahweh. *Tsadaq* is a baseline qualification for door number one.

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But there is an even more fundamental requirement for eternal life. Our bodies were not built to live forever. Further, as we saw in the previous chapter, the soul—the *nephesh*—cannot function independent of its body. Any physical body, whether animal or human, that has been separated from its soul is, by definition, dead. This is a universally observed phenomenon: nobody gets out of here alive. That is why Yahweh (whose whole point in creating us was to make companions for Himself who could choose to reciprocate His love *forever*) breathed into us the *neshamah*—the capacity for receiving His Spirit, or *Ruach*. Spirits, unlike souls, are eternal. Neither Yahweh nor the spirit messengers He created (commonly known as angels and demons) can ever die. Thus unless a human soul is indwelt with a spirit, it will perish when its mortal body dies. Just like any animal.

That's why Yahshua told Nicodemus, **"Unless one is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."** (John 3:3) I know your translation probably reads "born again," but the Greek word is *anōthen*, meaning "from above" (from *ano*: up, above, or upward). The distinction, as we shall see, is important, for although He didn't say it here, it's also possible to be born "from below," so to speak. Yahshua proceeded to educate one of the most learned men in Israel on the fine points of having a body, soul, and spirit, as only the One who had created them in the first place could explain: **"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit [both of them, is the connotation—physical birth followed by spiritual re-birth], he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'"** Flesh, of course, is the body. Being "born" is the indwelling of this body with a *nephesh*, or soul—it is then "alive" in the mortal sense. But if we are to be equipped for everlasting life, the *nephesh* is not enough; one's *neshamah* must in turn be indwelt with God's eternal Spirit. **"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."** (John 3:5-8) We can't see air moving; we know the wind is blowing only by the evidence it offers. It's the same with the Spirit. You can't see it, but its presence can be detected by what happens in and through your life.

That is why, in the John 8 passage we looked at a few pages back, Yahshua told the Pharisees, **"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.... He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."** (John 8:44, 47) These religious teachers were "born *again*," all right, but they weren't "born from above." Their father was not Yahweh, but rather "the devil." Stated another way, Yahshua told them, **"Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers, how can you escape the condemnation of hell?"** (Matthew 23:32-33) From Genesis to Revelation, Satan is described as a serpent. By calling the Pharisees a "brood of vipers," Yahshua was identifying their spiritual father: Satan himself.

That explained their actions: the son advances the agenda of his father, whether good or evil. Yahweh's agenda can be boiled down to one word: love. Satan's agenda, on the other hand, is our submission—the exercise of power and dominion over one's fellow creatures (which *defines* Islam as a purely satanic doctrine, if you think about it). It's a fascinating phenomenon, really. Yahweh, being the self-existent Creator, is the only One to whom power naturally belongs. He therefore doesn't consider it a thing to be grasped at or coveted—it's just a normal component of His existence. Rather, He wants the only thing ultimate power *can't* bring Him: the reciprocation of His love for His creatures—us. We were created for no other purpose. That's why He has gone to such extraordinary lengths to invite us to participate in His love.

Satan, meanwhile, was created (like all angelic beings) to be God's servant—brilliant and beautiful, but a servant nonetheless, with no creative nature and no capacity for love. All he really knows is submission, for that is what his role was intended to be: Yahweh says “do this,” and His angels perform His bidding. But Satan rebelled, exercising a choice that was never his prerogative, like a corporal telling his general to take a hike. And now, all he can do is look at Yahweh and covet what He has (by virtue of who He is): power, authority, and dominion. Since Satan in his pride wants to be “like God,” he believes that the more he can coerce his fellow creatures into submission to himself, the closer he will get to his goal. But it wouldn't matter if he convinced every human being who ever lived to rebel against his Maker: Satan can never be remotely “like God.” He'll never be more than what he is—a revolting wannabe.

As the ubiquitous scriptural metaphor presents it, we as children represent our fathers, advancing His agenda before the world. Thus if our spiritual Father is Yahweh, we will one way or another reflect and advance His love to those around us. But if, as Yahshua revealed about the Pharisees, our spiritual father is actually Satan, then the devil's agenda will in turn become our agenda. We will be motivated primarily by a desire to enhance our positions of power and/or wealth relative to our fellow man. Don't misunderstand me: this is something fundamentally different from working hard to get ahead in your career with the ultimate aim being to provide a good, comfortable life for yourself and your family. Satan's goal is our *submission*. Likewise, his children invariably attempt to suppress, dominate—even enslave—others in order to elevate themselves by comparison. It is one's *relative* position that becomes important to them. A key component is envy—covetousness—wanting what they think others have. This is an outgrowth of pride, which leads to arrogance, leading in turn to abuse—the antithesis of love.

This is far more sinister than merely following one's animal instincts through life. In fact, most motivational triggers are spiritually neutral. The “big three,” power, sex, and money, will serve as examples. To one born from above, whatever power he has is considered a gift from God, a tool to be used to make the world a better place or to alleviate suffering. Sex is a joyful expression of oneness with one's mate, a physical communication of one's love. Money, like power, is a gift to be used wisely. It is a means, not an end, and the material blessings it can buy (for yourself or for others) are to be received with thanksgiving and gratitude, for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can take nothing with us when we leave it. But if one is born “from below,” power is something to be grasped in order to elevate one's status. Sex becomes conquest, an opportunity for physical domination on an intimate scale. And money is the lubricant that greases the wheels of pride.

So our reactions to the normal impulses of our environment are geared to the spirit (if any) living within us. But if we're honest with ourselves, we'll recognize that many—even most—of the people around us show no evidence of any kind of spiritual rebirth in their lives. They aren't driven by God's love, but neither are they consumed with a desire to control and dominate those around them. Their "beliefs" are stated in declarations like: "I believe I'll have another beer." At best, they're just living their lives, studiously unaware of the spiritual warfare going on around them. At worst, they're victims, held in bondage by those advancing Satan's agenda. But either way, they're spiritually dead—or more accurately stated, they're spiritually *unborn*. It is this group to whom Yahweh and His redeemed are reaching out, inviting them into the fellowship of life and love and familial relationship. But it is this same group that Satan and his spiritual children are determined to keep under subjection, in the dark, reserved for door number two: death.

That is why scripture spends so much time condemning Satan's "third-door" converts—who are in all likelihood as few in number as Yahweh's "first-door" children. It is they, not Satan directly, who make it their business to prevent the spiritually unborn from finding life. And by doing so, they place themselves in direct opposition to God's primary objective: the salvation of mankind. Peter told us about them: **"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber."** (II Peter 2:1-3) The word for "destruction," used four times in this passage, is one we've seen before: the Greek *apoleia*, defined as destroying, ruin, waste, loss, utter and eternal destruction—*Strong's* describes it as "the destruction which consists of eternal misery in hell." Here the English words (or the concept presented in the scriptures) fail even the lexicographers, for "destruction" is technically incompatible with "eternal misery." *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says of *apoleia*, "What is meant here is not a simple extinction of existence [what we're calling door number two], but an everlasting state of torment and death." Well, that's not quite it either, for "torment" and "death" are, once again, mutually exclusive concepts, though we're starting to get the idea. *Apoleia* describes what we've been calling door number *three*: eternal spiritual consciousness in a state of total separation from Yahweh (the Greek *apo* is a preposition meaning "of separation"), bringing with it the torment and anguish of unending remorse. When Peter says **"their destruction (*apoleia*) does not slumber,"** he's personifying the torment that these false teachers will suffer: "it" will not become careless or

negligent, nodding off to sleep (Greek *nustazo*) but will rather remain ever vigilant, wide awake. Literally, a fate *worse* than death.

Look carefully at the way Peter describes them. These false teachers will work in secret, deny Yahweh's provision for salvation, and gather to themselves a large following. Because they falsely claim to be God's representatives on earth, many of the lost, the spiritually unborn, will observe their hypocrisy and selfish intent and curse the God they say they serve. They say, *If this is the kind of person God wants, then I don't want to have anything to do with Him.* The false teachers' motivation is covetousness, and their means is exploitation. Like their father, Satan, their agenda is to force, trick, or otherwise compel those who fall into their clutches to submit to them, kneel before them, *pay them.*

Peter goes on to describe their destiny: **"But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness."** (II Peter 2:12-13) The Greek grammar is really tough here (reflected in the wide disparity between translations). The NASB puts it like this: **"But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong."** The *victims* of false teaching aren't necessarily doomed to eternal damnation like their overlords are. Note that "destruction" here is not *apoleia*, but *phthora*, meaning decay, moral corruption, or depravity. False teachers are not Teflon coated. The filth they dish out will inevitably stick to them—in this life as well as the next. Those who have sought and attained positions of authority through which they "speak evil of the things they do not understand" will be touched by the evil they spread. It doesn't matter whether they deal in religion, politics, commerce, education, or war. What goes around comes around.

And in the end, their destiny is eternal darkness. **"These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."** (II Peter 2:17) Wells without water promise to slake the thirst, but provide nothing of value. You can't drink false hope. Nor does the parched land benefit from clouds that merely scud by overhead. A false promise is far more cruel than silence. Therefore, those who lead the spiritually unborn astray, those who conspire to keep them from experiencing the light of Yahweh's love, have a confirmed reservation in Hotel Hell, described here as "the blackness of darkness." And their stay is described as *forever*. As the Eagles' old rock anthem put it, "You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave."

It's an interesting phrase: "the blackness of darkness." The Greek *zophos* means deep gloom, the blackest darkness of hell. And *skotos* is the word for the darkness of night, also indicating "darkened eyesight or blindness; the darkness of

ignorance respecting divine things and human duties, and the accompanying ungodliness and immorality, together with their consequent misery in hell.” (Strong’s) Scientists tell us that there are places within every galaxy called “black holes,” where the gravitational pressure is so great that not even light can escape. Crushing, voracious, and utterly lightless, these black holes provide an apt metaphor for what hell is like. (And who knows? Perhaps they’re more than metaphors. Could it be that Yahweh has reserved a black hole for each soul inhabited by Satan’s spirit? This thought is obviously beyond SF10 on my speculation scale, but that doesn’t mean it *couldn’t* be true.)

Jude used a lot of the same language Peter did in describing these people. He, too, begins by warning about false teachers sneaking in. **“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ...”** The only defense against false teachers is to adhere tenaciously to the scriptures, the basis of our faith. In fact, he says, these very scriptures warned us about them, and foretold their fate. The phrase rendered “long ago were marked out for this condemnation,” literally reads: “having been previously written for this judgment.” The Greek word *prographo* means to write before (in the sense of time), or to depict or portray openly. Jude is not talking about being predestined to hell (like it sounds in some English translations) but about being forewarned of the coming judgment. The particular false doctrine Jude was concerned with here was the odd notion that because we are under grace, we are free to lead a life of sin and debauchery, since we have our “fire insurance.”

Jude next gives examples of people (and angelic beings) recorded in scripture who had promoted the same error, which as you’ll recall he equated to a denial of Yahweh and His Messiah. **“But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that Yahweh, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire....”** You’ll note that the line between “bad behavior” and “false teaching” has been blurred somewhat here. Taking Jude’s last example, sodomy, as a test case, we should note that falling into the worst sort of sexual sin is not in itself unforgivable, but when one crosses the line and begins publicly *promoting* a homosexual lifestyle as if it were God’s natural order of things, we have taken our first step through door number three. A “gay pride” parade is nothing short of a march to hell. The word so unfortunately

translated “vengeance,” by the way, means nothing of the sort: *katadike* actually indicates a judicial decision, especially one of condemnation, and by extension, the execution of that sentence. We’re talking about law and justice, not petty vindictiveness on the part of God.

**“Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘Yahweh rebuke you!’ But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah....”** Okay, so it seems Jude is suffering from a little Attention Deficit Disorder. Or is it just our English translation? The subject is still the false teachers who deny Yahweh and pervert His grace. Why in the world would Jude condemn them for “speaking evil of *dignitaries*?” Who (or what) are these? The word *doxa* is invariably translated in the New Testament as glory, majesty, honor, or some such concept—traits that “dignitaries” would be expected to display (in a perfect world, anyway). But that’s not what the word connotes at all, except by a long and convoluted reasoning process. It’s primary meaning is simply: an opinion, what one thinks, a viewpoint—it’s always used of a “good” opinion in the scriptures.

With this insight, we can finally see what Jude was saying. The false teachers are known by their propensity for belittling the godly opinions of Yahweh’s people: they “speak evil of whatever they do not know.” Jude’s examples, then, make this principle clear. Cain despised Abel’s opinion of Yahweh’s instructions, so he killed him. Balaam willfully disregarded Yahweh’s blessing upon Israel, selling them out despite his knowledge in order to make a quick buck. And Korah rebelled against Moses’ view of the mandate Yahweh had given him. One as erudite as Michael the archangel, however, refused to put his spiritual foot in his mouth as these false teachers are wont to do; he simply deferred to Yahweh’s opinion on the matter.

Jude concludes: **“These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.”** (Jude 3-13) The summary description is one of imperfection, irreverence, and selfishness. Their promises are proven false, they provide nothing of value, and for all their activity, they amount to nothing but useless froth. Their destiny is to be “twice dead,” both *nekros* and *thanatos*, dead in body and in eternal anguish of spirit. “Wandering stars” is a telling description. The Greek *planes* (wandering) comes from a root which means “to lead or go astray.”

The planets of the solar system were referred to as “wandering stars” because unlike true stars, they didn’t have fixed positions in the heavens—they aren’t stable. What Jude couldn’t have known (but intimated anyway) is that planets have no light within themselves. Whatever brightness they exhibit is just a reflection from a real light source. Thus we see the same phrase Peter used: “the blackness of darkness forever.” Door number three represents, quite literally, the night of the living dead.

Yahshua couched the same truths in terms more familiar to his first-century audience. He said, **“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.”** He’s talking about the same false teachers Peter and Jude described—those who make it their business to prevent people from coming to Yahweh. And He makes two comparisons: He says that either death or mutilation would be preferable to what they will actually experience. **“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where ‘Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’”** (Mark 9:42-44; cf. Isaiah 66:24) Neither this “fire” nor the “worms” need be taken literally. I believe Yahshua is merely using terms His hearers could easily relate to. Fire speaks of judgment, of testing and trial. The very word *sheol* (the grave, the place of the dead) is derived from a verb meaning “to ask, to enquire.” And the “worm,” of course, speaks of corruption, putrefaction, decay. But we’re talking about lost souls indwelt with immortal spirits here, for whom literal fire and real worms would hold no horror. The *spiritual* equivalent of “fire” and “worms” will be another matter, I’m guessing. Yahshua is saying that physical death, decay, and dissipation are far better than the fate of anyone who even *tries* to keep one of “these little ones”—including the spiritually yet-to-be-born—from finding freedom in Yahweh’s love. In other words, door number two is infinitely better than door number three, which is what you’ll get if you willfully prevent people from entering door number one.

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Since all men die, a subsequent potential life (or living death) beyond the grave is implied in the familiar words of Yahshua to Nicodemus: **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”** None of us are “saved” from physical death (or some other mode of departure from mortality, like the rapture), nor is the condemnation of which Yahshua speaks in the following verses something that will be experienced fully in this world. **“He who believes in Him is not**

**condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**" (John 3:16-18) The dividing line between condemnation and vindication is one's belief in—his trust and reliance upon—the Messiah, or more precisely, His *name*, which literally means Yahweh Saves.

"Condemned already?" Until I came to recognize the three-door concept, I never understood this statement: it *seemed* to be saying the same thing I'd heard in sermons all my life—that if you haven't "gotten saved," if you haven't made a "profession of faith in Christ," then you're on your way to eternal fiery torment. Therefore, you'd better come forward and repent before they're through singing the last verse of "Just As I Am," if you know what's good for you. Frankly, it didn't seem quite right to me, but being a dutiful Christian, I swallowed hard and went along with this teaching, despite my misgivings. It's not that it wasn't Yahweh's prerogative to send people to hell for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, but it was the very antithesis of His revealed character.

Now I realize that Yahshua wasn't making mean-spirited threats; He was just stating a fact. If one has not been "born from above," (which is the result of the choice one makes to "believe in," to trust and rely upon, Yahweh) then his *neshamah*—by definition—has not been indwelt with Yahweh's Holy Spirit. It is empty of life. Consequently, when his body dies, his spiritless soul will die with it, just as with any animal. He is thus truly "condemned already." It is a state we are born into, but a state that can be changed at any time as long as we draw breath—transformed from condemnation into vindication by our decision to rely on Yahweh.

There's a caveat, however, one Yahshua explained elsewhere: if you have been born *of Satan*—if you have accepted *his* spirit into your *neshamah*, then your condemnation has become permanent and irreversible. **"Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation."** (Mark 3:28-29) The parallel passage in Matthew 12:31-32 makes it clear that even such speech uttered against "the Son of Man" (that is, Yahshua in His role as a human being) may be forgiven (since we "know not what we do" most of the time, and while life lasts, it is possible to change one's mine—repent). But this is *not so* with libel against the Holy Spirit—the source of spiritual life. This blasphemy (Greek *blasphemia*) is not a technical religious term, but ordinary slander, reviling, or defamation—abusive speech intended to injure someone's good name.

Our thoughts and attitudes eventually emerge in our words and deeds, and what we say and do in this life will follow us for eternity. Later, in the same context, Yahshua said, **"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good**

man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:34-37) That is true generally, but especially true in the case of what we do and say about Yahshua the Messiah: **“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.”** (Romans 10:9-10) The point is that we speak of that which lives within us. If Yahweh’s Holy Spirit is the source of our spiritual life, we will find it impossible to slander Her. We will honor *both* our spiritual Father and Mother, as we’re commanded to do in Exodus 20:12. If, however, we have accepted and embraced the spirit of Satan, we will be able to do nothing else—slandering God will be part of our nature. And what of those who are spiritually unborn? Spiritual things are spiritually discerned: they will have nothing to say on the matter.

Nicodemus was, at the time of his after-hours conversation with Yahshua, of this unborn group. But he was an honest searcher, so Yahshua described the state of condemnation into which we are all born (spoken of in John 3:18, above) to him in general terms. **“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”** (John 3:19-21) We are fallen creatures: all of us do “evil deeds,” and we are all subsequently “condemned.” But belief (i.e., reliance, trust, faith) in the grace of God makes us alive in His Spirit and moves us from darkness into the light of truth. The choice we make, then, is between darkness (where we were born) and light (into which we can be subsequently *reborn*). The distinction being drawn here is between door number one and all possible alternatives.

Unfortunately for mankind, Yahshua foresaw that those who chose light and life would be relatively few. **“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”** (Matthew 7:13-14) A quick look around us will confirm that most of the world prefers the broad path that we now know ultimately leads to destruction—or to something infinitely worse. This observation is not vindictive, judgmental hysteria on my part; it is merely a somber assessment of the way things are. A tree is known by the kind of fruit it bears. As the writer to the Hebrews put it, **“The earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.”** (Hebrews 6:7-8) What he didn’t

state is the fact that much of the time, there is no fruit at all—nothing terribly evil but nothing particularly good, either.

An incident related by Mark illustrates the principle: **“Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He [Yahshua] was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, ‘Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.’ And His disciples heard it.... Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away.”** (Mark 11:12-14, 20-21) Because Yahshua used the occasion to teach on the efficacy of prayer, we often miss the underlying message: if we bear no fruit, we are dead where we stand. Since fig trees often metaphorically speak of Israel, Yahshua was subtly prophesying the coming barren state of the nation, but the message is as universal as it is ominous. As nations and as individuals, we need to examine the fruits of our labors. Is there any? And if there is, are we promoting ignorance, despair, and submission to the world’s system, or are we bringing forth enlightenment, optimism, and inner peace? Are we part of the problem, part of the solution, or just taking up space? The answers have perpetual consequences.

Don’t confuse ritual and religion with faith and a familial relationship with God. It does no good to be “religious” if you deny the reality of Yahweh’s presence when you’re not sitting in a pew. **“There is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops....”** Yahshua spoke these words in reference to the most religious guys in town, the Pharisees. He began by warning his disciples to “beware of their leaven, which is hypocrisy,” in other words, their corruption, hidden from view but evident through its effect. Hardly anybody these days understands that Yahshua hadn’t changed subjects when He went on to say, **“And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear him!”** (Luke 12:2-5) *Who* has the “power to cast into hell?” Most everybody first thinks it’s Satan, and then, after a little thought, decides it’s God. But look at the context: Christ is warning us about the religious elite, those who would “secretly bring in destructive heresies” designed to elevate themselves over their fellow man. And what kind of “power” do they have? The Greek word is *exousia*, meaning the authority to act or rule, the liberty of doing what one pleases. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* describes *exousia* as the “ability to perform an action to the extent that there are no hindrances in the way, as distinct from δύναμις [*dunamis*] in the sense of intrinsic ability.” In other words, no one can throw you into hell if you don’t let them. But those who would have you trade faith for religion, swap grace

for either works or license, or exchange Yahweh for a god of any other description are to be feared as you would fear a rabid dog.

In a twisted sort of way, we can feel fortunate that the scribes and Pharisees were around to trouble Yahshua, for they provide the perfect picture of what the denizens of door number three are like: **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”** A *hypokrites* is literally “one who answers”—an interpreter or stage actor, a pretender. That’s the first key: they *pretend* to represent God while they reinterpret or judiciously edit His word to suit their own purposes. **“For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.”** This is key number two: they not only shun Yahweh’s truth themselves, they work to prevent others from benefiting from it. **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers.”** Key number three is heartless greed mixed with religious display. They don’t care who they hurt as long as they themselves can elevate their own position in some manner. **“Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.”** (Matthew 23:13-14) Greater than *whose* condemnation? Greater than their victims’, who will *merely* be cheated out of eternal life because of the selfish ambition of these false teachers. Willingness to commit spiritual murder, as described here, is the most obvious indicator that someone has allied his soul with Satan’s spirit—and has thereby chosen door number three: *damnation*—not merely death, but eternal waking torment as he contemplates forever the Holy Spirit of Yahweh whom he so foolishly blasphemed.

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Christians—even those steeped in tradition and religiosity—count on the reality of Door #1, eternal heavenly bliss for those “in Christ.” And for most of them, the converse eternal reality—hell’s torment after death, what we’re calling Door #3—is every bit as obvious. After all, both everlasting destinies were characterized in some detail, however figurative and nebulous, in the New Testament. Indeed, for most of Christianity’s two thousand year history, the church (that is, the religious hierarchy that put themselves in charge of it) has used the prospect of hell, as well as the promise of heaven, to intimidate the faithful into behavioral compliance. *Mansions in glory are good, and the lake of fire is bad, so do what the church tells you to do, or else!*

But Door #2, the simple annihilation of the soul after death, has never been a component of Catholic *or* Protestant doctrine. Despite what scripture plainly says, the idea of the possibility of *death* after life (in lieu of damnation in hell fire) was something the church just didn’t find *useful*. Besides, the scriptural descriptions of

hell's terrors are just too vivid and colorful to ignore or deny. The Bible speaks of someone who **"shall...drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night."** (Revelation 14:10-11) Jude describes it as **"suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."** (Jude 7) Its denizens, he says, are like **"wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."** (Jude 13) Christ spoke of people being sent **"to hell [*Gehenna*], into the fire that shall never be quenched—where 'Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'" (Mark 9:43-44) He was quoting from Isaiah, who spoke of a time when **"'All flesh shall come to worship before Me,' says Yahweh. 'And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.'"** (Isaiah 66:23-24) This nasty place (or state) is where Satan himself will spend eternity: **"The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."** (Revelation 20:10) Yahshua told us that He Himself would one day declare to some, **"Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels,"** a place of **"everlasting punishment."** (Matthew 25:41, 46)**

No, only a fool would deny the existence of hell. That being said, heretics and morons throughout the ages *have* proposed the idea of the annihilation of the soul as an *alternative* to hell. Not comfortable with a God of justice who has standards of righteousness (especially ones that neither they nor anyone else have ever been able to keep), they can't conceive of a hell the way the Bible describes it—a place of unceasing anguish, torment, and remorse, a waking nightmare from which there is no escape.

But Yahweh is *also* portrayed in scripture—to the point of ennui—as a God of mercy, of loving kindness, of tenderness, forgiveness, refuge, and grace. The Psalmist tells us that **"He knows how we're built."** He understands that we're frail, mortal creatures, made of dust, who are *guaranteed* to fall short of His standards of holiness. That, of course, is why he provided a perfect sacrifice, capable (if only we'll receive the gift) of reconciling us to Himself.

To the lost, Yahweh's salvation is all theoretical. There is a gaping hole in our collective human experience: for one reason or another, many in this world are never given the opportunity to respond to this amazing gift. The extreme example, of course, is the forty-five million children who are murdered in the womb every year. They didn't love God, nor do they have His Spirit dwelling within them, because they never got the chance to meet Him. God could honestly say to them, **"I never knew you."** But is eternal waking torment appropriate for them? No, it isn't. Although hell is perfectly appropriate in an afterworld administered by a

just and holy God, it is *not* an appropriate destiny for people whose only crime in life was not knowing Him. Why is it so hard to see what scripture actually says: that *both* destinies are possible—one unimaginably horrible (when compared to the blessing that could have been), and the other even worse.

There are billions of people walking the earth today whose culture (over which they have no control or influence) prevents them from hearing about the truth of Yahweh's love—for their entire lives. Since they were children, they've been told such things as (1) God is interested only in their submission, and he has predestined them to hell fire (except for a select few who might attain paradise if they can manage to get themselves killed fighting in his cause), or (2) God has abdicated his authority to people whose pronouncements, opinions, and traditions take precedence what He actually said and did, or (3) God doesn't exist—we were created purely by chance, and there is no deity to whom we must answer. Do the people who live in cultures permeated by these lies deserve to spend eternity in torment, remorse, and mental anguish for the crime of not knowing something they couldn't possibly have learned (in any specific way) in the ordinary courses of their lives? Again, I must insist, the answer is no. (That being said, "eternal remorse and mental anguish" *is* rightly reserved for those who perpetrate and perpetuate these prevarications. See II Peter 2.)

I have been listening to sermons for over sixty years, and *not once* have I heard a pastor differentiate between the villains of this world and their victims, as far as their eternal destinies are concerned. *Not once* have I heard anyone describe the functional difference between death and damnation. *Not once* has any of my teachers explained how a God of justice can also be a God of mercy. But these have for the most part been godly and learned men, dedicated to the scriptures and careful in their exegesis. In truth, of course, most of them merely "preached around it," studiously avoiding the subject altogether. Not one of them was willing to address the conundrum, so thoroughly entrenched in Christian doctrine, of Yahweh's apparent injustice in consigning to hell's torment *everyone* who failed to "make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ." I can't imagine how many honest seekers have been repelled over the years by this hypothetical God who is characterized this way by His own "fans." It's one more case of our religious traditions causing the world to blaspheme our God.

But as I said, the vast majority of scriptures that shed potential insight on the subject demand no such conclusion. Yes, there's a heaven, and yes, there's a hell, and whoever goes to either eternal destination is defined in very specific terms in scripture. But most of humanity, if we're honest with ourselves, fits neither criteria. They are neither redeemed nor damned; they have neither Yahweh's Spirit nor Satan's dwelling within them. For all practical purposes, they're just human animals. It's their *potential*, of course, that separates them from apes and

aardvarks: God built all of us with the capacity for Spirit-fueled eternal life, a mechanism (called the *neshamah*) that sets us apart from ordinary animals.

Why can't pastors see this? Do they take a course in seminary that removes all capacity for rational thought? Are they trained to ignore the apparent inconsistencies they find in scripture (when viewed through the lens of traditional religious dogma)? Or is it that they're merely trained to avoid rocking the traditional boat for fear of chasing their congregations away? If Yahweh can be trusted with our souls, He can be trusted to be consistent. In fact, if He *is not* consistent, then He's a liar, for His scripture says: **"God is not man, that He should lie, or a son of man, that He should change His mind. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has he spoken, and will He not fulfill it?"** (Numbers 23:19) If there's a problem (and you must admit, this whole issue is fundamentally problematical), it's in our perception, not His revelation. If we see what look like contradictions in scripture, we need to reexamine our presuppositions, our traditions, and even our Bible translations. We need to question what we thought we knew.

But Yahweh never overtly described Door #2, did He? Well, yes and no. On the one hand, Door #2 is *nothing* (or *nothingness*), so there's really nothing to describe. On the other hand, He *did* describe it—so many times and in so many ways that we don't even see it any more. It's right there under our noses, hiding in plain sight, and we either don't see the references or misconstrue them as descriptions of hell, Door #3. It's not God's fault if He warned of destruction, and we see visions of a living hell—something entirely different.

In both Hebrew and Greek, there are quite a few words that describe various shades of meaning for this oft-misconstrued state—of perishing, destruction, annihilation, ceasing to be. We have already been introduced to a few of them. But these aren't technical descriptions of what I've been calling "Door #2." They're just ordinary words, used to define what we see in happening the temporal world. The epiphany comes when we realize that Yahweh didn't tell us *anything* on a pointless whim. Everything in scripture points toward a larger, more significant truth, and death is no exception. Physical death is "only" a symbol of the spiritual death that awaits if we don't discover how to circumvent it—a way that Yahweh has provided (which is the whole point of the Bible). Let us, then, examine a few of these words under a microscope.

(1) *Abad* is a Hebrew verb that means, to perish, vanish, go astray, be destroyed, killed, blotted out, done away with, or lost (*Strong's*). It can mean "not existing"—having a state of no longer existing, annihilated, exterminated, wandering (i.e., being lost and without a plan, whereabouts unknown), or squandered, wasted, with a total lack of value for the object (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*). As you can see, none of that would

even hint at hell as we know it, if the word were to be applied to the afterlife. But it would, rather, describe Door #2 perfectly.

(2) *Tsamath* is another Hebrew verb with a similar definition. It means to put an end to, cut off, destroy, exterminate, extirpate (that is, to remove or destroy totally; do away with; to pull out by the roots), terminate, or annihilate (*Strong's*). The *DBLWSD* adds that it can mean to silence or be silenced, to cease, i.e., have an event or state stop. Again, there is no inkling of “eternal torment in hell” here, but rather a total cessation of activity—a pretty good description of Door#2 if the afterlife is in view.

(3) *Shamad* is verb meaning to be destroyed, exterminated, devastated, or annihilated (*Strong's*). The *DBL* defines it as “be destroyed, decimated, perished, overthrown, exterminated, i.e., pertaining to being in a totally ruined state, which can include death of a person or extinction of an entity, demolish, bring to ruin, annihilate, wipe out, or get rid of.”

(4) In Greek, a word we've seen before is *apollumi*, meaning to destroy, ruin, perish, lose, disappear, cease to exist, fail to get, or die. *Strong's* notes that this destroying means “to put out of the way entirely, abolish, put to an end, to ruin; render useless.”

These words all describe very bad things, things no reasonable person would choose as his destiny, whether in this present life or in the hereafter. But they aren't at all compatible with the “hell” of which the Bible speaks—that place (or state) of unending conscious torment, of knowing *about* Yahweh's unfathomable love but having no part in or access to it. In order to be in anguish—in order to suffer any kind of distress as a result of the choices he has made in this life—one must *be*, he must exist as a living organism, he must be conscious and cognizant of his condition. But if *abad*, *tsamath*, *shamad*, or *apollumi* are used in scripture to describe the afterlife—even metaphorically—then we must rethink the “two-doors to eternity” theory under which the church has been operating for the past two millennia.

With that in mind, let us check the record. Asaph writes, “**For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish [*abad*]; You have destroyed [*tsamath*] all those who desert You for harlotry. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord Yahweh, that I may declare all Your works.**” (Psalm 73:27-28) Our English versions vary on the tense of that second phrase: some say “You destroy,” while others read “You will destroy.” The point is, the two things are related: *because* “God destroys those who have deserted Him,” they (those who have placed themselves far from Him) will perish. But is this destruction *hell*? No, not in the technical sense described in scripture—a place or state of unending torment. It is, according to what *abad* and *tsamath* actually mean, annihilation, vanishing, ceasing to be—in other words, Door #2. It's a question of proximity to God: if you want to be

near Him, you certainly may, but you can also choose to be totally separated from the sole Source of life. I have no idea why anyone would want this, but God allows it. Choice is our prerogative.

In most times, and in most places, the deck is stacked against anyone who believes in Yahweh and His Messiah. Culture and government often conspire to make us outcasts in our own homes. America was an exception until recently, but our laws now protect and favor every perversion, while muzzling Christianity's pleas for holiness, godliness, and loving kindness. So the Psalmist writes, **"Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with You? They gather together against the life of the righteous, and condemn innocent blood. But Yahweh has been my defense, and my God the rock of my refuge. He has brought on them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off [tsamath] in their own wickedness. Yahweh our God shall cut them off."** (Psalm 94:20-23) A society that has turned its back on God's law (in a word, *love*) cannot endure. But a society is comprised of individuals, and it is they—the people who “gather together against the life of the righteous”—who shall be “cut off in their own wickedness.” Amazingly (again), God's word choice reveals that hell *per se* is not necessarily in view, but termination and extermination are their fate.

In the same vein, David (speaking for Yahweh) writes, **"Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy [tsamath]. The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure. My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with Me. He who walks in a perfect way, he shall serve Me. He who works deceit shall not dwell within My house. He who tells lies shall not continue in My presence. Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land, that I may cut off [tsamath] all the evildoers from the city of Yahweh."** (Psalm 101:5-8) The verb *tsamath* is often used in a temporal sense, of course, describing conflict between people and nations. But here, as in so many places in scripture, God's long-term *intent*—not His momentary *modus operandi*—is what's being described. Our experience tell us that Yahweh does *not* ordinarily “destroy slanderers” or “cut off evildoers” *in this life*. Rather, He gives them time—their whole lives—to repent of their wickedness. Therefore, what's being described here is, in fact, the afterlife. But once again, “cutting off all the evildoers from the city of Yahweh” is not remotely the same thing as sending them to hell. God's word choice doesn't support that supposition. They are, rather, silenced, stopped, made to cease: *tsamath*. **"Behold, God is my helper. The Lord is with those who uphold my life. He will repay my enemies for their evil. Cut them off [tsamath] in Your truth."** (Psalm 54:4-5) Bear in mind, however, you can't logically characterize “being cut off” as a good thing, just because it's not “hell,” exactly.

Physical death is equally certain whether one is rotten to the core or walks (comparatively speaking) righteously before God. So what were Job's friends talking about? Eliphaz intoned, **"Remember now, who ever perished [abad] being**

innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off [*kachad*—to hide, conceal, efface, or annihilate]? Even as I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the blast of God they perish [*abad*], and by the breath of His anger they are consumed [*kalah*—to come to an end, be used up, spent, or finished].” (Job 4:7-9) Get real, Eliphaz. *Nobody’s* innocent; *everybody* perishes. But God doesn’t personally execute people who fall below a certain behavioral standard, no matter where the bar might be set.

Bildad opined, “The memory of [the wicked] perishes [*abad*] from the earth, and he has no name among the renowned. He is driven from light into darkness, and chased out of the world.” (Job 18:17-18) I guess he never heard of Che Guevara, Yasser Arafat, or Osama Bin Laden, or even Adolph Hitler—all lionized long after their deaths by people of a certain ideological mindset. Bildad and Eliphaz were both offering theories as to why Job was having such a hard time—presuming (in error) that God’s hand was heavy upon him because of some hidden evil in his life. But they weren’t stupid. They certainly understood that we’re all mortal; we all eventually perish. So whether they meant to or not, Job’s two friends were actually describing what happens to the wicked *after* death. In addition to *abad* (which we defined above), note that two other words use here to describe the condition of the wicked (*kalah* and *kachad*) also support the Door #2 concept, but not that of Door #3, hell proper.

Isaiah, for one, is not confused about the eternal state of those who align themselves against Yahweh and His children. Even if they’re still walking around causing trouble, they’re dead where they stand: “They [the enemies of God’s people] are dead, they will not live. They are deceased, they will not rise. Therefore You have punished [Hebrew *paqad*: literally counted, numbered, inventoried] and destroyed [*shamad*] them, and made all their memory to perish [*abad*].” (Isaiah 26:14) When he informs us that “they will not live,” he’s ruling out hell as it’s described in the New Testament, for hell requires its inmates to be alive and in conscious torment (whatever that actually entails for a disembodied soul hosting a demonic spirit).

Speaking of the same people, Isaiah writes, “Behold, all those who were incensed against you (Israel) shall be ashamed and disgraced. They shall be as nothing [*’ayin*], and those who strive with you shall perish [*abad*].” (Isaiah 41:11) Since we *all* perish in the literal, physical sense, the prophet can’t be restricting his observations to the death of the body. But we’ve already established that *abad* (to perish, vanish, be destroyed, or lost) fits our conception of Door #2 perfectly if the afterlife is in view. Here it is reinforced with another description of the state of dissipation or annihilation: *’ayin* means nothing, no, or naught. The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages* notes that *’ayin* is “a negative reference to an entity, event, or state,” as in “All nations before [Yahweh] are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than

**nothing and worthless.**” (Isaiah 40:17) In hell, you are “something,” and that’s not good. “Nothing” can feel neither pleasure nor pain; it can experience neither adoration nor anguish. So as bad as it is, Door #2 represents either astounding mercy or tragic loss, depending upon that to which you’re comparing it.

Symbolically, the promised land represented “life with Yahweh.” So being evicted from the land is a picture, a metaphor, of being removed from Yahweh’s presence. So Moses warned Israel, **“If you by any means forget Yahweh your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish [*abad*]. As the nations which Yahweh destroys [*abad*] before you, so you shall perish [*abad*], because you would not be obedient to the voice of Yahweh your God.”** (Deuteronomy 8:19-20) He’s not talking about literally perishing—the lot of all men—but rather of the nation of Israel being thrown out of the promised land, being removed from Yahweh’s sight. This is in turn a *picture* of Door #2. Joshua repeated the admonition to the next generation: **“When you have transgressed the covenant of Yahweh your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of Yahweh will burn against you, and you shall perish [*abad*] quickly from the good land which He has given you.”** (Joshua 23:16)

The “perishing” or “destruction” (*abad*) that would be suffered by the Children of Israel in response to their idolatry consisted of their being expelled from the land of promise for many generations, hidden from the face of Yahweh. This was, of course, a bad thing. Was I premature, then, in comparing their fate to Door #2 (which, though bad, is not the worst fate imaginable)? I think not, for a parallel example is provided in scripture that *could* logically be compared to hell (i.e., Door #3). Consider the destiny of Edom. I described it in detail in Chapter 17 (“Winners, Losers, and Wannabes”) so I won’t repeat all the gory details. But recall this scene, from the prophet Malachi: **“I have loved you [Israel],’ says Yahweh. Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ ‘Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ says Yahweh. ‘Yet Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness.’ Even though Edom has said, ‘We have been impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places,’ thus says Yahweh of hosts: ‘They may build, but I will throw down; they shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, and the people against whom Yahweh will have indignation forever.”** (Malachi 1:2-4) Symbolically, “vanishing (*abad*) from the good land” (Israel’s punishment) is a picture of Door #2, while suffering Yahweh’s “indignation forever” (Edom’s fate) is a terrifying image of Door #3. As Isaiah described it, **“[Edom’s] streams shall be turned into pitch, and its dust into brimstone. Its land shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night or day. Its smoke shall ascend forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste. No one shall pass through it forever and ever.”** (Isaiah 34:9-10) Edom’s destiny sounds like hell, I’d say. Israel’s does not. There *is* a difference.

If any of these observations have merit, then it is evident (surprisingly enough) that merely being “wicked” does not in itself precipitate an eternity in hell’s torment (necessarily), but rather, “only” earns someone destruction, annihilation, and death. The Psalmist writes, **“The wicked...are like chaff that the wind drives away.... The wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish [abad].”** (Psalm 1:4-6) The word translated “wicked” here (“ungodly” in some versions) is *rasha*, meaning, wicked, criminal, one guilty of a crime, hostile to God, or in violation of a standard. *Rasha*, of course, is where *all of us* begin. (Christ called it being “condemned already” in John 3:18.) But the state of being “righteous” is available to us if we choose to accept the gift. In a sense, however, “righteous” is a misleading translation: the adjective *tsaddiyq* denotes being justified and vindicated by (and before) a holy God, making us *positionally* righteous, upright, just, and innocent (i.e., *declared* guiltless according to the same standard that condemned the *rasha*—the wicked—to nothingness).

So in the end, the difference between eternal life and everlasting death is all a case of whether we *choose* to be vindicated by Yahweh’s own righteousness—or not. **“O Yahweh, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep. A senseless man does not know, Nor does a fool understand this. When the wicked spring up like grass, and when all the workers of iniquity flourish, It is that they may be destroyed [shamad] forever.”** (Psalm 92:5-7) In the long run, the “thoughts” and “works” of Yahweh that are most significant to us are those through which He provides for our redemption. He has demonstrated His love for us. If we’re not senseless fools, we will choose to reciprocate that love. **“Yahweh preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy [shamad].”** (Psalm 145:20)

Before Yahshua taught us about the fine points of the afterlife (specifically pointing out the horrors of Gehenna, a.k.a. hell, a.k.a. Door #3), men knew very little about what happens after physical death. It was pretty clear that disembodied souls went to a place called *sheol* (rendered *hades* in Greek), and that Yahweh vindicated the righteous while destroying the wicked, but the concept of *hell* as a place of unending torment (defined by choosing to take part in Satan’s destiny by being born of his spirit) is nonexistent (or at least extremely subtle) in the Tanach. Perhaps the reason is that until the advent of the Messiah, no one could logically be accused of blocking another person’s access to Him—something characterized by Yahshua as spiritual murder. So Christianity’s traditional interpretation of the destruction of the wicked dead as “hell”—i.e., what we’ve been calling Door #3—is entirely due to unwarranted extrapolation of what we know of hell based on unambiguous New Testament warnings concerning Gehenna (usually from Yahshua Himself).

This begs us to reexamine our thoughts on Door #2 as revealed in the Old Testament. Could it be that all these words used to describe the state of the wicked dead are really just polite euphemisms for something infinitely worse than what the Hebrew terms really indicate? The only way to know for sure is to scour the *Greek* scriptures to see if they too support a differentiation between death and damnation. And as we've already seen (albeit in subtle terms) they do, especially in the use of the word *apollumi*, which is a pretty fair translation for the Hebrew *abad*. (For example, the Septuagint, in Psalm 73:27, uses ἀπολοῦνται, the third person plural present-tense passive indicative form of *apollumi*, to render the Hebrew *abad*—perish—into the Greek.)

To reprise the definition of *apollumi*, it means to destroy, ruin, abolish, put an end to, lose (i.e., lose something one possesses—like his life), render useless, disappear, cease to exist, fail to get, be lost (in a spiritual sense) or die. (In the interests of full disclosure, I should point out that *Strong's Enhanced Lexicon* notes that *apollumi* might *metaphorically* mean “to devote or give over to eternal misery in hell,” but I think that’s because it never occurred to them—or anybody else, apparently—to distinguish death from damnation, and maybe because they think “hell/Genenna” is the same thing as “sheol/hades,” which it isn’t. This part of their definition, if you think about it for a nanosecond, is fundamentally contradictory to the rest of it: destruction and eternal misery are mutually exclusive concepts.)

Let us, then, examine a few salient examples of how *apollumi* is used in the New Testament. **“These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost [*apollumi*] sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”** (Matthew 10:5-8) This supports the John 3:18 characterization of those who have not (yet) been born from above in Yahweh’s Spirit as “condemned already.” They are lost, but unlike the denizens of hell, they are not beyond being found, as long as their mortal lives endure. The point is that under Adam’s curse, we are *all* born into the state of *apollumi*, and unless something is done to revise that status (through “rebirth” in an immortal spirit), the condition will persist after we die: the potential for eternal separation from God will have become permanent reality.

By the way, the reason the disciples were sent to Israel—and not to the gentiles or Samaritans—was that it was God’s purpose to make the offer of redemption to the Jews *first*, just as He has entrusted them with the Torah and the prophets. It was always Yahweh’s plan to make His redemption available to the world *through* the Jews, though not exclusively *to* them.

Speaking of lost Samaritans, **“And when His disciples James and John saw this [Yahshua’s cold reception by a Samaritan town], they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?’ But He turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy [apollumi] men’s lives but to save them.’”** (Luke 9:54-55) Though these Samaritans, in their misplaced jealousy of the Jews, didn’t welcome Christ when they first met him, the time of their awakening would come—after the resurrection (see Acts 8:25). These mixed blood Samaritans were, like the Jews and the gentiles, “condemned already” to destruction (*apollumi*) until they were born from above in Yahweh’s Spirit. Those who view Yahweh as a vindictive bully just itching to send sinners to hell couldn’t be more wrong: His entire agenda is to *save* men—from damnation certainly, but also “mere” death. But the choice is ours: He won’t force us to receive His life, though it is offered freely to us as long as we draw breath.

In contrast, Satan’s agenda is to destroy us—to see to it that we never share in the bounty of God’s grace—which is why Yahshua called him a “murderer” in John 8:44. But, Yahshua, using the metaphor of the Good Shepherd’s sheepfold, says, **“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy [apollumi]. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”** (John 10:9-10) The devil doesn’t have to persuade us to actually receive his spirit in order to accomplish our destruction. All he has to do is prevent us from receiving Yahweh’s gift of life: if we *do* nothing, we will *be* nothing. Game over. Rebellion works fine for him, but apathy, distraction, peer pressure, and a boatload of quasi-plausible counterfeits can get the job done as well. But Yahshua says, **“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish [apollumi]; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”** (John 10:27-28)

One of Satan’s most effective tools, however, is to get people to believe that neither heaven nor hell exist at all—that this mortal life is all there is, and when it’s all over dissipation of the soul is the universal destiny of all mankind. So (as the atheist theory goes) there is no point in seeking God, or doing anything that isn’t calculated to give you pleasure, profit, or power in the short run: it’s your basic evolutionary hypothesis. This, of course, can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. **“Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose [apollumi] it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.’”** (Matthew 16:24-25) That is, if you put all of your eggs in the basket of your mortal existence, making no provision for your spiritual potential, you are (by definition) lost. If you convince yourself that man is nothing but a talented animal with no spiritual destiny or purpose, then your error will destroy you. But if you place your mortal

life under submission to your spiritual existence (something you can't even prove exists), then your life in Christ will continue forever. So it boils down to this: are we or are we not willing to take God's word for it?

That's why Satan (when using the "atheist strategy," which admittedly is not his only ploy) would have you believe there is no God—and thereby lose out on the life beyond mortality Yahweh has provided for us. But Satan's *other* favorite ploy, religion, would have you believe that God doesn't know how to provide justice and mercy at the same time—implying that He is *neither* just nor merciful. (This is not just a Christian error, either; Muslims believe roughly the same thing.) So Satan is willing to show us two sides of the same fraudulent coin: either Door #2 exclusively, or a choice between Doors #1 and #3—either nothing after you die, or a choice (defined by the religious elite) between bliss and torture. Neither of these destinies fits the character of the God revealed in the Bible. He is just *and* He is merciful—both at the same time. But the only way this could be possible is that all three destinies—eternal life, death, and damnation—are part of the picture. The entire word of God implores us to choose life while rejecting any and all possible alternatives.

One last angle needs to be explored—that of accidental or unwarranted physical death as a picture of its spiritual equivalent—Door #2. Again, we see the Greek word *apollumi* used to describe this state. **“There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish [*apollumi*]. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed [*apokteino*—to kill, destroy, allow to perish, extinguish, or abolish] them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”** (Luke 13:1-5) Those enquiring of these unfortunates seem to have been laboring under the same mindset that Job's friends had: that if bad things happen to you in this life, it is an indication of Yahweh's direct and focused displeasure. But as we learned then, this is rarely the case. Rather, bad things happen because we live in a fallen, cursed world. Mother Teresa and Adolph Hitler are both dead. Yahweh's promises of temporal blessings or cursings (e.g. Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28) are for the most part national in scope. Daily providence aside, He rarely intervenes in the affairs of individuals, for He is extremely reticent to abridge our prerogative of free will (which is not to say our bad choices can't have disastrous consequences of their own).

We might phrase the question, “Do you suppose those three thousand souls who died in the Twin Towers Islamic terrorist attack of 9/11 were worse sinners than anybody else?” No, they were just ordinary people, no better or worse than

the people who were working in, say, the Chrysler Building that day. Yahshua's point is *not* that if you repent you can avoid physical death (expressed as *apollumi*). It's that although physical death is an unavoidable facet of the human condition, *spiritual* death *can* be avoided. The way to avoid spiritual *apollumi*, Door #2, is to repent (*metanoeo*—to change one's mind, direction, purpose, or attitude for the better), and pass instead through Door #1, life in Yahweh's Spirit. As Paul put it, **"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing [*apollumi*], but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."** (I Corinthians 1:18) Once again ('cause you might have missed it): we're *all* perishing in the mortal, physical sense; but we "who are being saved" through the message and mechanism of the cross are not subject to spiritual *apollumi*—destruction, abolition, disappearance, loss.

Paul also makes the rather obvious point that if resurrection (and in particular, Christ's) doesn't happen, then we are all—even *followers of Yahweh*—doomed to the annihilation of the soul described by *apollumi*. **"For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished [*apollumi*]. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."** (I Corinthians 15:16-19) This, of course, is the atheist position—"there is no god, so there is no life beyond what we're living right now," as John Lennon put it, "no hell below us, above us only sky." If the atheists were right, Christians would be fools worthy of pity or scorn for believing in fairy tales of life after death—and more to the point, letting our mortal imperatives take a back seat to the promise of God's eternal Spirit. On the other hand, if we Christians are right, then the atheists are the pitiable fools.

We're trying to determine what *apollumi* really means. If the only possible eternal destinations are heaven's bliss and hell's eternal torture, then the *apollumi* of which Paul speaks here describes being consigned to hell, Gehenna, the lake of fire—door #3, damnation. But he speaks of it as applicable to Christians *only if Christ is not risen*. If *apollumi* actually means "damnation in hell," that scenario leaves us with hell's eternal torment but with no corresponding possibility of eternal life with God. In the end, it's an assertion that Satan (who will one day be consigned to hell for his rebellion against Yahweh) exists; but at the same time, Yahweh (who created him and is responsible for punishing him) does not. In other words, it's utter nonsense.

The bottom line is that the actual words of scripture (despite many centuries of religious tradition to the contrary) support and describe a doctrine of eternity composed of *three* (not just two) possible destinations: Door #1—eternal life for those who have chosen to be born from above in the Holy Spirit of Yahweh (by receiving the grace provided by Yahshua's atoning sacrifice, as predicted in the

Torah, Psalms, and Prophets); Door #2—destruction of the soul, the annihilation of conscious life, the state of being nothing for those who have not received the eternal life provided by Yahweh’s indwelling Spirit; and Door #3—eternal waking torment of the soul in hell, a state of unending anguish and remorse for those who knowingly chose to be “born from below,” indwelled with Satan’s immortal spirit.

But here’s the rub: it is impossible to “choose” Door #2, for its very definition implies a failure to choose any destiny at all. Knowing what we know now, one would think that the vast majority of mankind would choose Door #1, but alas, we have been informed that this is not the case. Yahshua admonished us to **“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction [apollumi, Door #2], and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life [zoe, Door #1], and there are few who find it.”** (Matthew 7:13-14)

And what about Door #3? How many will choose to share Satan’s fate? You’d think that there wouldn’t be many, and I have no insight or knowledge to suggest what fate people in the past have chosen. But it is with unmitigated horror that I must report that the vast majority of mankind will purposely and consciously align themselves with Satan during the Great Tribulation—the last three and a half years of this age—earning for themselves a living death forever and ever. **“And all the world marveled and followed the beast [the Antichrist]. So they worshiped the dragon [Satan] who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’ ... It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”** (Revelation 13:4-8)

Like I said, unmitigated horror.

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Moses pointed out that Yahweh would take a personal, face-to-face role in the administration of His wrath, leading us (again) to the inescapable conclusion that something beyond the death of the mortal body is in store for God’s enemies, just as it is for His friends: **“He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them.”** (Deuteronomy 7:10-11) Be honest now. When’s the last time you saw Yahweh deal face-to-face with a wicked person in *this* life? It rarely happens,

even in scripture, because God tends to leave the window of repentance open until the last possible moment—the Methuselah factor. He is therefore talking about something yet future, and the scriptures reveal what that is: the Great White Throne judgment—face-to-face confrontation with the Almighty.

The function of the Great White Throne is *not* to separate the saved from the lost. In the present world, that happens the moment we die: when “absent from the body” the souls of the redeemed are “present” with God (II Corinthians 5:8). In fact, the redeemed of the first six millennia will have received their immortal resurrection bodies long before the GWT takes place. Thus their status as “saints” will have been established for at least a thousand years. And what about the redeemed of the seventh Millennium? There is no indication that *they* will stand before the GWT either, for those on trial are the “dead” of every age, people whose names are not found in the Lamb’s Book of Life, souls whose fate will be determined by what is written in the books recording their deeds, their “works.” (See Revelation 20:12-13.) The redeemed are *never* condemned by their works, for their shortcomings are covered by the blood of Christ. Evaluated for their rewards, yes. Condemned, no.

If the Great White Throne is not intended to separate the saved from the lost, then what is its purpose? Is Yahweh merely giving unrepentant men an opportunity to explain themselves—to give them their “day in court?” Not likely. Or is some substantial issue being decided, based upon what is found in the books of the deeds of men mentioned in Revelation 20:12? To phrase the question in terms germane to our present topic, if the purpose of the GWT isn’t to sort out who among these “dead” are merely that—destroyed souls—and who is actually damned to sharing Satan’s piteous existence for eternity—then what issue is it designed to determine? Or conversely, when and how are the inmates of Door #3 to be separated from those of Door #2, if not at the Great White Throne?

Let’s review the salient passage. John begins by telling us that the redeemed dead of the Tribulation will be raised to reign with King Yahshua for a thousand years, and then he explains what happened to everybody else: **“But the rest of the dead [nekros: the lifeless, the physically deceased] did not live again until the thousand years were finished.”** (Revelation 20:5) He used the broadest possible term for the “dead.” Because all the redeemed of every age have at this point either received their immortal “resurrection” bodies, or (possibly) are still alive in their mortal ones, the phrase “the rest of the dead” can only mean the lost—and logically, *all* of them, whether they embraced Satan’s spirit or not.

A bit later, John relates what these “dead people” whom God has made to “live again” will experience after the thousand years have passed: **“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.”** To call the throne “white” is an anemic

understatement. It was *leukos*: a bright, brilliant light. A fitting place for Almighty God to sit in undiminished glory. **“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books....”** The word translated “judged” tells the tale. It’s *krino*, whose primary definition is “to separate, put asunder, to pick out, select, or choose.” (*Strong’s*) Its linguistic root means “to part or sift.” We need to ask ourselves: who is being separated from whom? It’s not the living from the dead—they were *all* dead. Rather, one category of “dead” is being parted from another. Yahweh is making the final determination of each individual lost soul—whether it will simply remain dead, or will join “its father,” Satan, in eternal anguish. He is determining who will enter door number two, and who door number three.

**“The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged [*krino* again: separated from one another], each one according to his works....”** Only Yahweh could make this decision. From our viewpoint, it’s seldom clear cut. Sure, you could say with some confidence that Muhammad and Hitler were threebies, and your next door neighbor, who’s a nice enough guy but never gives God a second thought, is probably a twofer. But there are millions for whom it would be a tough call. Remember, Yahshua specifically condemned the Pharisees as a class, but both Nicodemus and Paul were Pharisees. It’s an individual call, one soul at a time, requiring the wisdom of Yahweh Himself. That’s what the Great White Throne is all about.

So what are we to make of John’s parting shot on the subject? **“Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”** (Revelation 20:11-15) *Nobody* standing before the GWT will find his name written in the Book of Life. As a result of the findings of this judgment, all of the dead, twofers and threebies alike, will undergo the “second death,” and all of them will be “cast into the lake of fire.” Are their fates identical, then? Is the “lake of fire” synonymous with hell, the abyss, and eternal punishment? Apparently not, based on everything we’ve discovered concerning the three doors.” So what’s going on?

It should be obvious that the “lake of fire” is not a literal description of the destination of the lost, but a metaphor, a word picture, of what’s in store for them. Neither death nor Hades could literally be thrown into a “lake” of any kind. But both *limne* (lake) and *pyr* (fire) are the ordinary Greek words for these things, so it is incumbent on us to ponder what the symbols mean. A lake is a specific, finite place with certain defining characteristics. Notice that he didn’t call it a “sea” or an “ocean.” Since *limne* comes from a root word (*leibo*) meaning “to pour,” we are reminded that lakes, unlike other bodies of water, have both an entrance and an egress: water flows in and then out again.

Hold that thought for a moment while we examine what fire represents. Classical Greek thought would have connected *pyr* to the idea of violence and irresistibility, to ritual purification, or seen it as an antidote to evil influences. Fire was employed in the Mosaic law to destroy what was sanctified in order to keep it from profanation. For example, **“If any of the flesh of the consecration offerings, or of the bread, remains until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, because it is holy.”** (Exodus 29:34) Fire’s consuming power thus prevents contamination; it is what removes the holy (that which is set-apart for Yahweh’s purpose) from the profane. I think we’re getting warm.

Fire is more often used as an image of the judicial wrath of God. For instance, **“Who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to Yahweh an offering in righteousness.”** (Malachi 3:2-3) This refining process is primarily one of separation—removing the worthless dross from the pure metal by heating it to a liquid state and letting the impurities float to the top. But here beyond the Great White Throne, the precious metal has already been removed and put in a safe place. So in the case of the “lake of fire,” the separation is that of one kind of dross from another—the merely worthless from the toxic waste—door number two from door number three.

Actually, the kind of stratification the Biblical imagery conjures up—separation into layers—is a commonly observed phenomenon in lakes and other bodies of water. This stratification occurs when water masses with different properties—density (called pycnocline), salinity (halocline), oxygenation (chemocline), or temperature (thermocline)—naturally form layers beneath the surface that act as barriers to mixing. These layers are normally arranged according to density, with the least dense water masses sitting above the more dense layers.

So the water in a lake behaves something like metal in a crucible: the lightweight stuff naturally separates from that which is more dense. The lake of fire, then, is a graphic portrayal of a place or state where lost souls enter a refining process—a *krino*-judgment that separates the dead from the damned. The lightweight worthless dross floats to the top of the “lake” and spills out into dissipation, annihilation, destruction—what we’ve been calling door number two. But the weightier Satanic spirit-laden souls—those who are pure evil, in contrast with those who are merely mistaken, selfish, stupid, lazy, or even unfortunate—sink “beneath the layer” to the bottom of this eternal abyss, never to escape, never to rest, never to forget. The bottom of the lake of fire is door number three.

The lake with which John would have been most personally familiar, of course, was Galilee, which in itself offers some unique and fascinating parallels to

the “lake of fire” illustration. Though it is the lowest fresh-water Lake on earth (at an average surface elevation of 700 feet below sea level), Galilee has a pronounced submarine halocline barrier—its fresh water layer (analogous to Door #2) sitting atop a base of salty water (the symbolic picture of the souls of Door #3) fed by salt springs beneath the surface. The Jordan River flows both into and out of the Lake of Galilee. (The word “Jordan” is transliterated from the Hebrew *yaraden*, meaning “the descender,” from *yarad*: to go down, descend, decline, or pour out.) Waters that descend from the lake of Galilee end up in the Dead Sea—a place from which there is no outflow, no escape, only dissipation and evaporation—an apt metaphor for the souls of door number two.

From where we sit in heaven’s grandstand, it seems that anyone who enters the lake of fire represents a tragic loss. And it is. But we need to also be aware of the incredible mercy of Yahweh in allowing the victims, the sleepers, and the careless of door number two to be “skimmed off the top” of the lake of fire—to escape the torment of eternal remorse into the relative comfort of nothingness. Yes, they don’t know what they’re missing. Thank God for that.

## Heaven, Hell, and Eternity

The popular conception of what the afterlife holds for us—whether positive or negative—has been thoroughly muddled by time and tradition. Now that we have established the scriptural principle that there are three possible eternal destinations for human souls, not just two, we need to more clearly define our terminology. Several words are used in scripture to describe places to which we might go after we die, where fallen angels will be consigned, or where the saved and the lost will spend their respective eternities. Folks tend to call everything good about the afterlife “heaven” and everything bad “hell,” but the practice of using all these various terms interchangeably has, as we have seen, invariably led to error and confusion.

Let’s begin with “heaven.” In the Old Testament, the words used almost exclusively are the Hebrew *shameh*, its plural *shamayim* (“the heavens”), or the Chaldean equivalent *shamayin*. Strong’s tells us it is derived from an unused root meaning “to be lofty. It is the sky (as aloft; the dual [or plural] perhaps alluding to the visible arch in which the clouds move, as well as to the higher ether where the celestial bodies revolve).” Thus *shameh* means the air or atmosphere and anything above that: properly, the “heights above” or the “upper regions.” By extension, the word can even be used of one who studies them: an astrologer.

Twice, both in the Psalms, the word *shachaq* is used, meaning “a powder; by analogy, a thin vapor; by extension, the firmament—a cloud, small dust, heaven, or sky.” I imagine this is the word they would have used for smog. And once (in the Psalms again) the word *galgal* is used. This too is weather related, meaning wheel, or by analogy, a whirlwind. Thus “heaven” basically meant the sky, where rain and snow came from (e.g. Genesis 8:2, Job 38:29), where the stars were (e.g. Genesis 22:17), where the angels stayed (e.g. Nehemiah 9:6); and where Yahweh lived (e.g. I Kings 8:30, Psalm 11:4). The big surprise is that in the Old Testament, heaven is *never* spoken of as a place where people go after they die.

And what about the New Testament? The basic Greek word for heaven is *ouranos*, meaning, according to Thayer, “the vaulted expanse of the sky with all the things visible in it,” including the aerial heavens or sky and the sidereal or starry heavens; and “the region above the sidereal heavens, the seat of an order of things eternal and consummately perfect, where God and the other heavenly beings dwell.” This definition lines up perfectly with the Hebrew *shameh*. Note that it’s not a technically “religious” term; it’s an ordinary Koine Greek word, with all the baggage that half a millennium of Greek culture would have added to it.

The Rabbis imagined a seven-leveled heaven, though the idea is not given credence in scripture. (Paul described being caught up to the “third heaven,” but this is not the third of the rabbinical seven but rather a common description of the abode of God—the first heaven being the atmosphere of our planet and the second being the starry sky.) Two other Greek words are translated “heaven,” but they just stress one part of it over the other—they don’t expand the meaning beyond *ouranos*, which is actually a component of both words. *Mesouranema* merely means “mid-sky,” in other words, “up in the air.” *Epouranious* means “above the sky—celestial,” used in such phrases as “heavenly Father.”

Okay, are you sitting down? In the New Testament as in the Old, “heaven” is never explicitly spoken of as a place in which believers permanently dwell after death. I know that will come as a shock to many, but before you pick up rocks to stone me (again), let me explain. The problem is not with Yahweh’s promises or with the genuineness of our salvation—it’s with our sloppy use of Biblical terminology. Notwithstanding passages that speak of great rewards in “heaven” (e.g. Matthew 5:12), treasures being laid up there (e.g. Matthew 6:20, Mark 10:21) or the hope of “**an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven,**” (I Peter 1:4) the only time in scripture that believers *themselves* are specifically spoken of as being “in heaven” is during the Tribulation. During that time the great martyred multitude waits before the throne of God for their company to be completed (cf. Revelation 6:10, 11:12). They are later seen—still in heaven—rejoicing as the Messiah assumes the throne of planet earth (Revelation 19).

Of course, until the Millennium begins, the twenty-four elders, symbolically representing the saved of all previous ages, will be there as well. So yes, if a believer dies today, his or her soul, having been made alive by Yahweh’s Spirit, will go to heaven, the abode of God. But as we shall see, the *eternal* disposition of all these souls is not a mere continuation of the heavenly status quo. Yahweh has something else—something very special—planned. You can call it heaven if you want. God calls it “the New Jerusalem.”

But I’m getting ahead of myself. We were discussing the Biblical terminology of the afterlife. Another word we use too loosely is “paradise.” A term borrowed in both Hebrew (*pardes*) and Greek (*paradeisos*) from the Persians (*pairidaeza*), it simply meant “a walled garden.” In the Old Testament it invariably means just that (e.g., the Septuagint uses *paradeisos* to describe the Garden of Eden). Paradise doesn’t take on any eschatological ramifications until we get to the New Testament. But the study of how it’s used there can shed some valuable light on the afterlife.

The word *paradeisos* is used only three times in the New Testament. The first is the familiar passage recording the exchange between Yahshua and the two

thieves being crucified beside Him. **“One of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”** (Luke 23:39-43) Today? Was Yahshua on His way to heaven? Only by way of the tomb. As Paul reminds us, **“He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth.”** (Ephesians 4:9) He didn’t bodily ascend to heaven for several days. Thus paradise can only be logically identified with a place called “Abraham’s Bosom,” a division of sheol (the grave) housing the righteous dead, something we’ll discuss in detail a bit later.

The second use of the word “paradise” tells a different story. Paul was presumably recounting his own near-death experience when he wrote, **“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven.... He was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful [Greek: *exesti*—literally: not possible] for a man to utter.”** (II Corinthians 12:2-4) He quite clearly identifies paradise not with sheol but with the third heaven, i.e., the abode of God. Note that there is no *law* against describing heaven; it just can’t be done.

The definition is complicated further by Yahshua’s use of the word in his letter to the church at Ephesus recorded in Revelation: **“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”** (Revelation 2:7) This tree of life is described in the last chapter of Revelation as being found not in the present heaven but in the New Jerusalem! So focusing strictly on its geography, paradise was once part of sheol, was moved to the third heaven (i.e., God’s abode) at the resurrection of Yahshua (along with the righteous dead who inhabited it)—and will be moved *again* when Yahshua reveals the New Jerusalem—the “place” He talked about going to prepare for us in John 14:2. But I think the key to understanding paradise is latent in its basic meaning—it’s a walled garden, a place of shelter, protection, and God’s provision. In paradise, no harm can come to you, all your needs are met, and you get to “walk with Yahweh in the cool breeze (*ruach*—literally: Spirit) of the day.” (Genesis 3:8)

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If the Old Testament’s heaven had nothing to do with the afterlife, then what happened to everybody who died? The place conceived to be the destination of good and bad alike was called *sheol*. The word is used 65 times in the Old

Testament, rendered in the KJV as “hell” in 31 instances, as “the grave” in 31, and as “the pit” in 3. *Strong’s* merely defines sheol as “the world of the dead (as if a subterranean retreat) including its accessories and inmates.” This makes the “hell” translation presumptive, if not flat-out wrong. The root word upon which sheol is based, *sa’al*, means to inquire or ask, which at the very least suggests an expectation of some sort of life after one enters the grave.

In the Old Testament, hell (in the normally understood sense of the word—an eternal, fiery destination for damned men and fallen angels) is a concept couched in language easily construed as mere metaphorical hyperbole. More often, the wicked, as we have seen, were warned of destruction and dissipation, not eternal torment. In concrete terms, pre-Christian-era man knew of nothing beyond sheol for the lost, and had only a vague conception of life after death for the righteous.

Job, by all accounts a righteous man, at first painted a gloomy picture of the place he expected to soon inhabit: **“Are not my days few? Cease! Leave me alone, that I may take a little comfort before I go to the place from which I shall not return, to the land of darkness and the shadow of death, a land as dark as darkness itself, as the shadow of death, without any order, where even the light is like darkness.”** (Job 10:20-22) In his distress, he is pessimistically anticipating his egress through door number two. A bit later, however, we see him coming out of his depression, expressing instead the hope that for him there is something beyond the grave—that Yahweh would remember him in sheol, call to him—and *change* him: **“Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service [*tsaba*: military duty, participation in the battle] I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You.”** (Job 14:13-15)

By chapter 19, Job has emerged from his blue funk. Though his circumstances haven’t changed, his long-range outlook is now totally optimistic: **“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me.”** (Job 19:25-27) That’s bodily resurrection—precisely the same thing Paul described in I Corinthians 15. (We discussed it in detail, if you’ll recall, back in chapter 8). Job’s observation is worth noting: if you have no living Redeemer—One who has paid your debt—you will not see God.

To what can we attribute the change in Job’s demeanor? It came about as he remembered the character of his God—a God whose power reached even into the grave. **“The dead tremble, those under the waters and those inhabiting them. Sheol is naked before Him, and Destruction has no covering.”** (Job 26:5-6) David concurs: **“Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in sheol, behold, You are there.”** (Psalm 139:7-8)

Notice something important here. Hell, in the ultimate sense of the word, is a place where the lost are separated from Yahweh—that’s what makes it *hell*. But this is not the case with sheol, at least not the Abraham’s-Bosom/Paradise side of it. Hell and sheol therefore cannot be the same thing.

Sheol is pictured as being the destiny of all men, the righteous and wicked alike. In a remarkable Biblical ghost story, Israel’s first king, having lost his spiritual bearings, visits his local gypsy fortune teller, the witch of Endor, hoping to get some *post*-last-minute advice from the recently deceased Samuel. The prophet’s ghost shows up (much to the witch’s surprise) and announces to Saul, **“Yahweh will deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me [i.e., dead—in sheol].”** (I Samuel 28:19) Samuel was probably thinking, *There goes the neighborhood*.

The clearest picture we have of the inner workings of sheol comes from a story Yahshua told. **“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.”** Although rich men aren’t necessarily all scoundrels and poor men aren’t necessarily all saints, that was the case here. **“So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom....”** Hades is the Greek word invariably used to translate the Hebrew/Aramaic word Yahshua undoubtedly used, sheol. Notice, however, that for the first time in scripture, we see a division in the underworld. Dives, as he has come to be known (pronounced Die-vees, Latin for “rich man”) is “in torments,” while Lazarus is getting ministered to by angels and comforted by Abraham. They’re both in sheol, and both conscious of their surroundings, but in separate compartments. And Lazarus is clearly enjoying this more than Dives is.

**“Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented....”** This isn’t saying that everyone’s circumstances will be automatically reversed in the afterlife, good for evil and vice versa, but it implies that there are a range of rewards or punishments in store for both the saved and the lost, based on the correlation between what we were given to work with in life and what we did with it. (I’ll have more to say about that in a moment.) This meshes perfectly with Christ’s parables about the servants and talents.

Bear in mind that this is sheol—the grave—not heaven, hell, the lake of fire, the abyss, tartaros, or some other description of the afterlife. The final Great

White Throne judgment has not yet taken place, and yet both the rich man and Lazarus have *already* been categorized as either saved or lost, redeemed or reprobate. Having the punishment commence before the trial rubs most Americans the wrong way, but remember, the Judge in this case is omniscient. The Great White Throne judgment, as we have seen, is not to decide one's guilt or innocence but to separate the dead from the damned. At this point, all three categories of expired mortals are being held in sheol.

Today there is a raging controversy as to whether or not the unsaved dead receive divine punishment before judgment Day. To my mind, Yahshua's illustration makes the answer crystal clear: they do—or at least, they can. Because Dives is said to be suffering “torment,” he has clearly been identified as destined for “door number three,” in other words, his *neshama* is indwelled with a demonic spirit, one that cannot die. So he knows exactly what he's faced with—an eternity separated from Yahweh. No wonder he's in torment. The “flame” that torments him is not literal fire (which would hold no terror for a disembodied soul), but rather that which refines and separates the good from the evil: Dives knows he's been found to be worthless, toxic dross, a fact that wasn't so evident in the living cauldron of mortal humanity.

Those who deny that men in sheol can, before the final judgment, suffer punishment are blissfully unaware that the Great White Throne does not establish guilt or innocence, but merely parts the lifeless from the living dead. They invariably say, “It's *only* a parable—one designed to teach a moral lesson, not establish doctrine.” They say, “The story was directed at the Pharisees—Jesus was merely accommodating their erroneous ideas about consciousness after death.” Actually, this story is not called a parable in scripture, although it could well be one. Yahshua, however, *never* accommodated anyone's false doctrine (e.g. Matthew 22:29). And remember, He's the only man in history (outside of Samuel's ghost) who was in a position to state with certainty what sheol was really like.

I can't countenance the idea that He would intentionally mislead us on such an important topic—especially since it would have been a simple matter to tell the story without resorting to detailed “lies” about the nature of sheol. If it weren't true, why would he go out of his way to say things like, **“And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.”** Then [the rich man] said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise

**from the dead.”** (Luke 16:19-31) Dives’ five brothers were apparently “twofers”—they had embraced neither Yahweh’s Spirit nor Satan’s at this point. (Note that there were six brothers all together—they represent humanity.) The rich man is not so much pleading that someone go back and make his brothers love Yahweh, but rather to warn them not to align themselves with Satan’s spirit, as he had. Dives would have been better off dead—annihilated, dissipated—than to have walked through door number three, and he knew it.

*There’s your moral lesson. Don’t ally yourself with Satan. The Jewish leaders—those who hadn’t yet irrevocably fallen (see Acts 15:5)—were being called to repentance when one (not-so-coincidentally named Lazarus) actually did come back from the dead to warn them. Instead of repenting, however, their politically correct solution to the “Lazarus problem” was to try to kill him permanently so he couldn’t confuse people with facts (cf. John 12:10-11). Then they succeeded in getting the Romans to crucify the very One who’d brought him back to life. Brilliant.*

“Abraham’s bosom,” where Lazarus (the one in Yahshua’s story) went after death, is a perfect match for the “paradise” of which Yahshua spoke to the repentant thief on the cross. From its description, we can safely conclude that it is the region of sheol reserved for those who trust in Yahweh’s grace to save them. The Greek word used for the rich man’s destination was *hades*, defined by Strong’s as “properly, unseen—the place (or state) of departed souls—the grave.” It is used eleven times in the New Testament, and the Authorized Version erroneously translates it ten of those times as “hell,” including the Luke 16 passage we just looked at. The one exception is I Corinthians 15:55, where it’s called “the grave.” I suppose considering what poor Dives was going through, calling *hades* “hell” is an understandable mistake. But technically, they’re not the same thing. In light of the information in Yahshua’s story, we can confidently describe the abode of the dead—at least until His resurrection—as sheol, a place divided into two sections: paradise (a.k.a. Abraham’s Bosom) for the saved, and *hades* for the lost.

In a way, the New Testament use of the word *hades* seems odd. Its meaning sprang entirely from the context of pagan thought. In Greek mythology, Hades (a.k.a. Aides or Aiidoneus) was the name of the god of the underworld—the unseen. He was supposedly the son of Cronus and Rhea, and brother of Zeus and Poseidon—with whom he gambled for control of the heavens, the sea, and the infernal regions. Hades apparently lost, and thus his lair, the “house of Hades,” was described as a forbidding abode deep within the earth (or alternately, beyond the ocean in the far West—the region seen by the Greeks as the realm of darkness and death, just as the East is of light and life). In the oldest Greek tales, it was (like the Hebrew sheol) the home of all the dead, good and bad alike. Homer and

later poets, however, contrasted hades with a rough equivalent of Paradise called Elysium, where “there falls not rain, nor hail, nor snow, but Oceanus breathes ever with a West wind that sings softly from the sea, and gives fresh life to all men.” (*The Odyssey*, Book IV) The house of Hades, by contrast, was a place where the dead were but shadowy reflections of their former selves: “The goddess [Circe] answered, ‘Ulysses, noble son of Laertes,...there is another journey which you have to take before you can sail homewards. You must go to the house of Hades and of dread Proserpine to consult the ghost of the blind Theban prophet Teiresias whose reason is still unshaken. To him alone has Proserpine left his understanding even in death, but the other ghosts flit about aimlessly.’” (*The Odyssey*, Book X)

Yahshua’s “Dives and Lazarus” story thus lines up sheol with the Greek concept of hades in some ways but not in others. Like Homer’s underworld, the abode of the dead is, according to Yahshua, split into separate areas for the saved and the damned. But as Yahshua described hades, the dead are (or can be) conscious and in torment, not “ghosts flitting about aimlessly,” as Homer put it—a concept that fits neither the dead nor the damned.

The traditional Hebrew concept was not all that far removed from that of the Greeks. A treatise from Josephus sheds light on the first-century rabbinical view of hades, a view that again coincides with Yahshua’s description in some ways and disagrees in others. He writes, “Hades is...a subterraneous region, wherein the light of this world does not shine.... It cannot be but there must be in it perpetual darkness. This region is allotted as a place of custody for souls, ill which angels are appointed as guardians to them, who distribute to them temporary punishments, agreeable to every one’s behavior and manners.” Note that although Yahshua describes the rich man as being “in torments,” he says nothing about angels administering the punishment.

“In this region” Josephus continues, “there is a certain place set apart, as a lake of unquenchable fire, whereinto we suppose no one hath hitherto been cast; but it is prepared for a day afore-determined by God, in which one righteous sentence shall deservedly be passed upon all men....” The rabbis saw the lake of fire as a feature of hades or sheol (cf. Isaiah 66:24). John’s vision, on the other hand, makes it clear that hades will eventually be cast *into* it (cf. Revelation 20:14), though as we learned in the previous chapter, the lake of fire is of necessity more a metaphorical description than a physical one. “The unjust...shall be adjudged to this everlasting punishment...while the just shall obtain an incorruptible and never-fading kingdom. These are now indeed confined in Hades, but not in the same place wherein the unjust are confined.” This lines up perfectly with Yahshua’s story about the rich man and Lazarus: there are (or were) two separate compartments in sheol/hades.

Josephus then describes the rabbinical view of paradise: “For there is one descent into this region, at whose gate we believe there stands an archangel with an host; which gate when those pass through that are conducted down by the angels appointed over souls, they do not go the same way; but the just are guided to the right hand, and are led with hymns, sung by the angels appointed over that place, unto a region of light, in which the just have dwelt from the beginning of the world; not constrained by necessity, but ever enjoying the prospect of the good things they see, and rejoice in the expectation of those new enjoyments which will be peculiar to every one of them, and esteeming those things beyond what we have here; with whom there is no place of toil, no burning heat, no piercing cold, nor are any briars there; but the countenance of the just, which they see, always smiles on them, while they wait for that rest and eternal new life in heaven, which is to succeed this region. This place we call The Bosom of Abraham.” It is clear from Josephus, then, that Yahshua was using contemporary terminology when describing sheol/hades—He did not invent the phrase “Abraham’s bosom.” (Josephus lived a generation after Yahshua, but it’s clear that he didn’t get his material from the writings of the Apostles.)

Josephus’ description of hades (i.e., the bad side of town) is just as graphic (and just as long-winded). “But as to the unjust, they are dragged by force to the left hand by the angels allotted for punishment, no longer going with a good-will, but as prisoners driven by violence; to whom are sent the angels appointed over them to reproach them and threaten them with their terrible looks, and to thrust them still downwards. Now those angels that are set over these souls drag them into the neighborhood of hell itself; who, when they are hard by it, continually hear the noise of it, and do not stand clear of the hot vapor itself; but when they have a near view of this spectacle, as of a terrible and exceeding great prospect of fire, they are struck with a fearful expectation of a future judgment, and in effect punished thereby: and not only so, but where they see the place [or choir] of the fathers and of the just, even hereby are they punished; for a chasm deep and large is fixed between them; insomuch that a just man that hath compassion upon them cannot be admitted, nor can one that is unjust, if he were bold enough to attempt it, pass over it.” Thus we see that Yahshua’s concept of an impassible “great gulf fixed” between hades and paradise—a chasm that cannot be crossed but allows a view of the other side—is just as the rabbis of his day pictured it. Josephus’ depiction of the primary nature of the torments of hades—the knowledge of separation from the blessed and the anticipation of judgments yet to come—also lines up with Yahshua’s teachings. As for the lost souls being dragged off to hades by angels who “threaten them with their terrible looks,” it would appear that the rabbis’ imaginations were working overtime, though no one suggests that it would be a pleasant experience.

Of course, we need to remember that the damned denizens of hades are disembodied souls—they won't receive their resurrection bodies until much later—at the end of the Millennium (cf. Revelation 20:5. The saints, in contrast, will receive theirs on rapture day or at the beginning of the Millennium—see Revelation 20:4.) Therefore, the nature of these “torments” is a matter of speculation. What, precisely, does a disembodied soul feel? Remorse? Mental anguish? The “thirst” that Dives sought to quench could easily be a metaphor for the emptiness of soul that is part of being separated from God, just as the “flame” that tormented him could be a metaphor for divine judgment. Without a material body, physical pain isn't possible. It's a sure bet, however, that being alive in hades isn't much fun.

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Hades isn't the only word translated “hell” in the KJV New Testament. Whereas hades and sheol are indicative of “the grave,” the interim abode of the dead, the word *geenna* (Gehenna or Ge-Hinnom) indicates a more permanent condition—hell itself. Significantly, of the twelve usages of the word in the New Testament, eleven are in quotations from Yahshua. Gehenna, as we have seen, is a name borrowed from the Valley of Hinnom, on the southern edge of old Jerusalem, a place where infant sacrifices to the Canaanite god Molech were once made. Specifically, the southeast end of the valley, where the horrific rites were performed, was called Tophet, or Topheth—the place of fire, so named because of the perpetual trash fires that burned there in later times.

One more word is translated “hell,” but it is used only once, in reference to the imprisonment of fallen angels. **“God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell [*tartaros*] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.”** (II Peter 2:4) *Tartaros* (or *tartarus*) is just another word from pagan Greek mythology that was pressed into service to communicate a Biblical truth. The Greeks envisioned it as being as far beneath earth as earth is beneath heaven. It was said that a bronze anvil thrown from heaven would take nine days to reach earth, and it would take that long again to fall from earth to *tartarus*. Basically, the idea here is *deep*. *Tartaros* is defined in Strong's as the “deepest abyss of hades.” But it is presumptuous to geographically associate the abyss, where the most dangerous demons were held prisoner, with sheol or hades. The two places have entirely distinct functions.

*Tartaros* is apparently synonymous with the abyss (Greek: *abussos*) or bottomless pit mentioned in Revelation 9. It's like the County lockup where criminal angels stay until their trial. After the judgment, however, they'll be sent

to the Federal pen—the lake of fire—hell—from which nothing is ever released. The fact is that Yahweh never intended for *men* to go there at all (no matter what the Calvinists say). Hell was created strictly for the angels who followed Satan in his rebellion, as we saw when we studied the separation of the sheep and the goats at the end of the Tribulation: **“Then He will also say to those on the left hand [the goats], ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’** (Matthew 25:41) In case you were wondering, the word “prepared” in the Greek is a participle—it should read “having been prepared.” It’s in the perfect tense—which means that Yahweh’s preparation of hell is an action that is complete but also has an ongoing resultant state of being. In other words, hell (i.e., the “everlasting fire”) exists today—it has already been prepared—even though no one, demonic or human, inhabits it yet. The word “fire” is the primitive Greek word *pur*, which ordinarily means “fire” in the literal sense. But it is also used symbolically. The *Complete Word Study Dictionary*, edited by Spiros Zodhiates, states: “Because fire [*pur*] is a frequent apocalyptic figure for divine judgment, one need not imagine that the flames spoken of in reference to hell are material. Undoubtedly fire signifies a horrible, painful and real judgment. Still, its symbolic usage in Scripture must be taken into account when interpreting these passages.”

If you’re like me, you’re probably curious as to how we got the word “hell” out of sheol, hades, Gehenna, tophet, or tartaros. We didn’t. The Scandinavian, or Norse, tribes of northwestern Europe had a death goddess (much like the Greeks’ Hades) whose name was Hel (Hellia in Germania). As in the Greek, the name of the goddess was eventually used to describe her domain as well. So when Christian missionaries brought their scriptures north, the word *infernus*—which had been used to translate the Greek Hades (itself just a rough equivalent for the Hebrew sheol) into Latin—was rendered Hel, or Hell. We got our generic English word for deity the same way: the Germanic gott, filtered through the Anglo-Saxon tongue, became “god.”

The place we normally think of as hell—the place “prepared for the devil and his angels” of which Yahshua spoke—isn’t actually designated by any of these epithets. It’s merely described in symbolic terms: in Revelation it’s called “the lake of fire.” We saw it (though not as a lake) in the warning of the angel to the Tribulation populace not to accept the mark of the Beast: **“If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”** (Revelation 14:9-11) The passage describes the fate of a particular group of non-believers—those who overtly worshipped

Satan and his Antichrist during the Tribulation. There's no destruction or dissipation of souls here: these are all destined for what we've been calling door number three. Notice: (1) they are in a fiery torment—just like the rich man in Yahshua's story; (2) the ordeal never ceases—it goes on without a break for all eternity; and (3) they are “before” [Greek: *enopion*] or “in the presence or sight of” both Yahshua and His angels—casting into doubt the idea that hell is “merely” a place devoid of the presence of Yahweh. God is Spirit, omnipotent and omniscient—it's not simply a case of being there or not being there. Clearly the Lamb and His angels are witnesses to God's wrath. It is left to our conjecture, however, whether that implies their presence or merely their knowledge of the administration of the “cup of His indignation.”

It bears mention that the Greeks, a few Jewish Rabbis, and even some of the early Christian patriarchs like Origen envisioned a temporary hell. For example, Socrates, according to Plato in the *Phaedo*, declared that minor sinners “are plunged into Tartarus, the pains of which they are compelled to undergo for a year, but at the end of the year the wave casts them forth.” Origen thought that even Satan could successfully repent and regain his original place, given enough time. Passages like the one above beg to differ. The Bible never even hints that hell's torments might be something less than permanent. In reference to the Revelation 14 passage at hand, R. C. H. Lenski pointed out that “The strongest expression for our ‘forever’ is *eis tous aionan ton aionon*, ‘for the eons of eons’; many aeons, each of vast duration, are multiplied by many more, which we imitate by ‘forever and ever.’ Human language is able to use only temporal terms to express what is altogether beyond time and timeless. The Greek takes its greatest term for time, the eon, pluralizes this, and then multiplies it by its own plural, even using articles which make these eons the definite ones.” If God had meant to convey something less than a permanent and unending hell, He couldn't have chosen more misleading words.

And what about torment? It has become fashionable to imagine a hell in which *no* lost souls will be punished (contrary to what scripture so clearly indicates) but rather are *all* to be annihilated—that a “merciful” God would never allow anyone to suffer for eternity. (In other words, they insist that there is no Door #3—hell—but Doors #1 and 2—heaven and death—exist.) While (as we saw in the previous chapter) those lost souls who never aligned themselves with Satan's spirit *will* simply be destroyed, dissipated, or annihilated in the end, I must reiterate that Yahweh's mercy was provided *up front*. It's not His fault that some would reject that provision and spit on His sacrifice, choosing instead to be indwelt with the spirit of the adversary. John reports that the followers of the Antichrist “**shall be tormented with fire and brimstone.**” (Revelation 14:10) The word he uses for “tormented” is *basanizo*, which means torture, pain, toil, torment, or vexation. Thayer notes that the word is derived from the testing of metals (with a

touchstone), hence “to question by applying torture.” This is not the word God would choose if the traitors enduring *basanizo* were to simply be annihilated. It implies consciousness, awareness, and anguish. Deal with it, world.

The lake of fire (as such) is most clearly delineated in Revelation 19 and 20: **“Then the beast [i.e., the Antichrist] was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.”** (Revelation 19:20) This could be taken to imply that the lake of fire is somewhere beneath the surface of the earth, for if the Antichrist and the false prophet are to be thrown *alive* into this place, there should logically be some physical connection, some portal, between the two worlds. On the other hand, Satan, a spiritual being, will be incarcerated in the same place: **“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”** (Revelation 20:10) It’s pretty clear that no earthly, material prison could hold our Adversary. So perhaps the real explanation will turn out to be something that we mortals in our three-dimensional experience aren’t equipped to comprehend—like a “parallel universe,” or some similarly esoteric concept. I don’t know (and don’t look so smug: you don’t either). But wherever (and whatever) hell is, it’s a place or state where “they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” My advice is, don’t go there.

We have seen the Antichrist, his false prophet, the Tribulation rebels, and then Satan himself being thrown into the lake of fire. What about the rest of the unsaved, those from past ages? Immediately after the Great White Throne judgment, we’re told, **“Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”** (Revelation 20:14-15) Death (Greek: *thanatos*) is, according to Thayer, (1) “the death of the body, i.e., that separation of the soul from the body by which the life on earth is ended.” (2) Metaphorically, it can also mean, “the loss of that life which alone is worthy of the name, i.e., the misery of the soul arising from sin which begins on earth and increases after the death of the body,” or (3) the miserable state of the wicked dead in hell.” Take your pick. As we saw in the previous chapter, the lake of fire is apparently where the lost dead of door number two get sorted out from the lost damned of door number three. More significantly, the very possibility of human death is destroyed at this time, for hades—including its inmates—is sent to the lake of fire. The lost dead of door number two have been dissipated into nothingness, and the damned of door number three have been consigned to eternal torment. Together, these destinations are called the “second *thanatos*.” With the believers clothed in their immortal resurrection bodies and with no new souls being made through human procreation, physical death has become an obsolete concept.

Who, then, are to be cast into this lake of fire, this second death? The simple answer is: **“The cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”** (Revelation 21:8) In other words, **“anyone not found written in the Book of Life,”** as we saw earlier. That list is enough to give me pause, for if I’m honest with myself, I must admit that at one time or another, I have been many of those things, in thought if not in deed—which is enough to make me guilty. But (praise God) Yahweh sees none of it—my sins are covered by the sacrificial blood of Yahshua. My name, therefore, *will* be found in the Book of Life. To put the shoe on the other foot, John explains who will *not* experience this condemnation: it is he who reflects the love of Christ. **“We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”** (I John 3:14-15)

John made it clear that people whose lives are *characterized* by their sinful lifestyles are in grave danger. Stated another way, **“Sodom and Gomorrah...are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”** (Jude 7) God’s mercy was extended to them, as it is to us, and they rejected it—becoming a byword, a proverb of the end to which our sins can lead us. But there are those who will find themselves worse off than Sodom in the end. Yahweh, being the epitome of fairness, takes into account the amount of “light” that has been shed upon a person or a people, and adjusts the punishment accordingly. The severity of judgment corresponds to the degree of enlightenment that was made available.

And how much more light could you get than to have Yahshua Himself, or his first disciples, teaching in your streets? To towns in Israel that heard His message and rejected Him anyway, He said, **“Know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you. But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day [i.e., judgment day] for Sodom than for that city.”** Then He gives some examples: **“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades....”** He’s talking about the grave here, not hell (though that surely follows for the towns’ unbelieving inhabitants). The historical fact is that these towns that rejected Him dried up and blew away, awaiting the archeologist’s spade—unlike places like Nazareth and Bethany, which still survive to this day. There’s a lesson for America here. We who have been blessed with so much light have all too often, like spoiled children, turned our backs on the One from whom the blessings flow. Can God in all fairness ignore this? Or does He owe Capernaum an apology? **“He who hears you [disciples] hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”** (Luke 10:11-16, cf. Matthew 11:20-24)

In a similar vein, Yahshua contrasts the light shed by Jonah and Solomon on their audiences—and the subsequent reactions—to the intransigence of His contemporaries. **“The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed [one] greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed [one] greater than Solomon is here.”** (Matthew 12:41-42) Being a child of God is like being anybody’s child—either you are or you aren’t. But the severity of judgment for those who aren’t will be based upon the opportunities they had for enlightenment, or the lack of opportunity. The Jews of Yahshua’s day had been graced with a greater light than men like Jonah and Solomon could have possibly provided. Therefore they will be held all the more responsible for having failed to read the writing on the wall. As will we.

What did the citizens of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba do that the Jews as a whole did not? They repented and received Godly wisdom. The word for “repent” here (Greek: *metanoeo*) doesn’t mean regret (there’s another Greek word—*metamellomai*—also translated repent, for that). According to Thayer, *metanoeo* means “to change one’s mind,” particularly “for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins.”

While we’re on the subject of differing degrees of punishment in hell, we should note whom Yahshua identified as the worst of all: religious people who use God’s grace as a scam: **“Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.”** (Luke 20:46-47) In their pride and arrogance these “teachers of the Law” misapplied God’s truth, slanting it to benefit themselves and in the process giving the people who depended upon them for guidance a false impression of what Yahweh wanted from them. Jude called false teachers like this **“wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.”** (Jude 13) Those who would presume to teach others about the word of God should do so with fear and reverence, for the Great Shepherd hates it when His sheep are led astray to be fleeced.

Yahshua, in his usual tolerant, non-confrontational manner (*cough, choke*), warned his listeners about leading God’s sheep astray: **“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell [Gehenna], into the fire that shall never be quenched—where ‘Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’”** (Mark 9:42-44, cf. Matthew 5:29-30, Matthew 18:8-9) It was such an important concept, he repeated it—twice. At the end there, He was

quoting from Isaiah: **“All flesh shall come to worship before Me,’ says Yahweh. And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”** (Isaiah 66:23-24) Gee, I guess the folks who say that a loving, merciful God could not have a hell in His universe are mistaken. The truth is that His love and mercy are proven not by His refusal to punish those who align themselves against Him, but by making astonishing efforts to save them—and their victims—from their very wickedness. Not very politically correct, I’m afraid.

Much of our misunderstanding of the nature of hell stems from the old Zoroastrian horse manure about the innate balance between the forces of good and evil—something that is only an illusion precipitated by Yahweh’s insistence on our right to choose between them. This naturally leads to the error that Satan controls hell as God controls heaven. There is a popular misconception that hell’s tortures are administered by demons, typified in Gary Larson’s hilarious *Far Side* cartoons about hell. In one, the devil torments be-bop sax legend Charlie Parker by personally playing “elevator music” on the piano for him—forever tickling the ivories. (My personal *Far Side* favorite is the guy who arrives in hell, avails himself of the complementary beverage service, and remarks, “Wow, they’ve thought of everything—even the coffee’s cold.”) The truth is that Satan does not rule hell—he’s merely going to be one of the inmates, toothless and ineffectual.

Satan can’t consign anyone to hell, and Yahweh doesn’t want to. He **“is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”** (II Peter 3:9) In fact, the only way to get there is to choose to go, to ride Satan’s coattails, so to speak. As we saw, the place was neither designed nor intended for people, only fallen angels. Our sins—the results of our very nature—have separated us from Him, and only our unbelief, our failure to choose to accept his grace, condemns us to remain separated from Him. But there’s separation, and then there’s *separation*. In our natural state, we *are* separated from God, a condition that becomes permanent when we die. Death in this sense is indeed tragic, but it’s not nearly the catastrophe that choosing to follow Satan’s lies will precipitate. Yahshua said, **“I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.”** He doesn’t *have* to judge him, for he is “condemned already,” as He says in John 3:18. **“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.”** (John 12:44-48) To “abide in darkness” is the ultimate calamity.

Will God forgive us? Yes, we have only to ask. Of *any* sin? Yes. And no. Yahshua explains: **“Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of**

**Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.**" (Matthew 12:31-32; cf. Luke 12:10) Mark adds, **"He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation."** (Mark 3:29) That sounds bad. So it's important that we understand precisely what the "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" is.

The context of the passage is the Pharisees' claim that Yahshua could only cast out demons because he was operating in the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons: they were attributing the works of God to Satan. It's easy to see how Yahweh would consider that blasphemy. But in the end, I think the principle applies to attributing the works of God to anything or anyone other than Himself—it's the Third Commandment all over again. Thus the systematic worship of a false god (Tammuz, Zeus, Allah, or Shiva, for example) can be blasphemy against the Holy Spirit if the worshipper never repents—changes his mind. Attributing Yahweh's magnificent creation to blind evolutionary chance is blasphemy as well—not to mention stupid. It's interesting (and typical of God's patience) that Yahshua recognizes that some will not immediately recognize the incarnation of deity in "the Son of Man" (Himself), and will in their ignorance speak words against Him. Paul is the perfect example of that. Our repentance will bring forgiveness of even that, as Paul's subsequent career amply attests. But we can't expect a holy God to eternally ignore our willful rebellion against Him—our blasphemy. As Yahshua put it in the same passage, **"He who is not with Me is against Me."** (Matthew 12:30) If you're worried about having inadvertently committed the unpardonable sin, you haven't. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, in the end, is a choice: the conscious refusal to accept the grace the Spirit of Yahweh has freely offered to all men through Yahshua's atoning sacrifice. The Spirit of God beckons. How will we respond?

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And what of those who *are* "with Him?" What do the scriptures have to say about heaven (in the sense of an eternal state of blessing, not "the sky")? A lot, as it turns out. Yahshua pointed out to his Jewish antagonists, **"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life [and the implication is, 'You're absolutely right to do so']; and these are they which testify of Me."** (John 5:39)

He went on to say, **"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they [in context, the children of Israel—Isaiah 54:13, cf. Jeremiah 31:33-34] shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to**

**Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life....**" This was a most provocative thing to say at this point in His ministry, but He, knowing the hard hearts of his audience, wasn't in a mood to be gentle with them. It was a bucket of cold water in the face for these religious leaders to be told, in effect, *If you had any kind of relationship with Yahweh, you would recognize that He and I are one—only through Me can you have the eternal life you seek.*

And then He made His message even harder to swallow: **"I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.'** The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, **'How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?'** Then Jesus said to them, **'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.'**" (John 6:44-54) It wasn't that the scribes and Pharisees couldn't understand that He was speaking metaphorically. The hurdle for them was their misconception of who the Messiah should be. They were prepared to follow someone (like Bar Kochba a century later, for example) who would throw out the Romans and rule with a rod of iron (retaining them in His top echelons of government, of course). They were not ready for a personal savior who would live within them, save them from their sins, and give them eternal life. That sort of thing was fine for *sinner*s, of course, but...

John the Baptist, unlike the Pharisees, saw things clearly. Speaking of Yahshua, he said, **"He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give [Him] the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."** (John 3:34-36) He was speaking to people who, for all they could tell, *were* alive—walking, talking, and breathing. But they were spiritually dead, and they would remain dead until and unless they believed in—trusted and relied upon—the Son of God for salvation. Later Yahshua revealed the flip side of this coin: **"Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death."** (John 8:51)

In what is probably the most well-known passage in the entire Bible, Yahshua told Nicodemus of this unending life—and how we could attain it: **"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."** (John 3:14-16) The "serpent in the wilderness" refers to an

incident in Numbers 21 when the rebellious Israelites were being plagued by poisonous snakes. When they repented and asked God for deliverance, He told Moses to put a bronze serpent (a symbol of both their sin and the slithering plague) on a pole: anyone who looked upon it in faith would be healed. In the same way, when we acknowledge that Yahshua took our sins upon Himself as he was crucified, we too shall be healed: we shall receive “everlasting life.”

By the way, the word we translate “cross” (Greek: *stauros*) actually means pole, or post. The “cross” consists of the upright *stauros* pointing toward heaven and what is known in Latin as the *patibulum*—the crosspiece, upon which Yahshua’s arms were outstretched in an invitation to avail ourselves of His grace. Moses’ snake-bite cure was therefore *designed* to be prophetic of our salvation through Yahshua’s sacrifice.

But I digress. The “everlasting life” of which Yahshua spoke is a byproduct of His own deity: **“We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which Yahweh erected.... For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”** (Hebrews 8:1-2, 9:24) And just as Christ has “entered His rest” in heaven, so shall we. **“If Joshua had given them rest, then He [not Joshua but Yahweh] would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.”** (Hebrews 4:8-10) This reference is one more implied confirmation of God’s seven-thousand-year plan. The Millennium, our day of rest, corresponds to Yahweh’s “rest” from His labors on the seventh day of creation.

When we follow our King into this ultimate Sabbath “rest,” we will do it as sons, not as subjects, and certainly not as slaves: **“You are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”** (Galatians 4:7) It is axiomatic that princes and princesses, if conducting themselves according to the wishes of their father the king, never have to worry about obtaining the basic necessities of life. So Yahshua reminds us, **“Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** (Luke 12:31-34) Because we’re “royals” in the Kingdom of Heaven, our circumstances here on earth should be of little concern to us. It’s like the old concept of *noblesse oblige*. Go ahead and be generous with the King’s wealth; spend it freely in alleviating the suffering you see around you—there’s always more where that came from.

The point (you know this by now, I’m sure) is not that you can buy your way into heaven, but that the possessions we think we own in this life are an illusion.

The real wealth is stored up on the other side of our mortality, if it's stored up anywhere. If you don't believe me, try taking your money with you when you die. As Paul put it, **"We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."** (I Timothy 6:7)

Yahshua tried to get this truth across to a wealthy young man, but without much success: **"Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' So Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. 'You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" And he said, 'All these things I have kept from my youth.' So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.'" (Luke 18:18-22)** God will always call upon us to give up whatever it is we're putting before Him in our lives. This, if you'll recall, was the heart of His very first Commandment: **"You shall have no other gods before Me."** (Exodus 20:3)

Yahshua taught this truth from many different angles. For example, **"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."** (Matthew 6:19-21) There are several lessons here. (1) It's pointless to amass wealth in this life that you can't enjoy in the next. (2) Wealth on earth is fleeting and vulnerable, whereas wealth in heaven is permanent and incorruptible. (3) It's perfectly natural to look after our investments, no matter what they are. (4) If we are *primarily* invested in the things of this life, we will have little interest in the next. And perhaps the most amazing point: (5) we actually *can* "lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven." We can't touch the principal, of course, but the interest, compounded daily, is paid in this life: **"love, joy, peace, [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self control."** (Galatians 5:22-23) It's called "the fruit of the Spirit," and it's tax free. This "fruit" is our passbook—the evidence that we do indeed have a bank account in heaven, and that eternal life has been deposited there for us: **"Having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 6:22-23) Can we trust this bank? Absolutely. As Paul says, **"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day."** (II Timothy 1:12)

A variation on the "treasure-in-heaven" theme can be heard in Yahshua's take on the popular reaction to His feeding of the 5,000: **"Jesus answered them and said, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food**

**which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”** (John 6:26-27) He had given them lunch, so they followed Him. However, they should not have been as impressed with the food as they were with the creative power of God—wielded in their presence and on their behalf by the Son of Man. Though they were going to be physically hungry again, they would never again have to experience spiritual emptiness.

A Samaritan woman Yahshua met at a well received the same truth. **“Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”** (John 4:13-14) What food, what drink, could one possibly ingest that would make him live forever? The Word of God. **“Oh, taste and see that Yahweh is good. Blessed is the man who trusts in Him.”** (Psalm 34:8)

For God’s part, the reason He provided the free lunch for the multitude is the same reason He provides eternal life for us: **“God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”** (Ephesians 2:4-7) Mercy, grace, kindness, love. And notice that this being “made alive” is not only something we will attain in the “ages to come,” but is also something we can have right now: **“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.”** (Colossians 1:13)

It can’t properly be said that heaven is our reward for living a righteous life. For one thing, none of us leads such a life. What righteousness we have in God’s eyes is a gift from Yahshua; and heaven, like our righteousness, is also a gift, unearned and undeserved. But there *are* rewards for faithfulness, and the kingdom of heaven is where we will receive them. **“Seeing the multitudes, [Yahshua] went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn and weep now, for they shall laugh and be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are you who hunger now, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for you shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they hate you, revile and persecute you, exclude you, cast out your name as evil, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice in that day, leap for joy, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”** (Matthew 5:1-12 and Luke 6:21-23, blended) The

rewards begin in this age, and will come to maturity like a savings bond (though not devalued by inflation) during the Millennium. The poor in spirit, those who mourn (especially for the sinful condition of the present world—see Ezekiel 9:4), the meek, and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will all be vindicated during Yahshua's thousand-year reign on earth. The merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers are seen as having a special relationship with God. And those who are persecuted for the cause of their faith will receive a great reward in heaven. Of course, these aren't mutually exclusive groups, but rather characteristics shared broadly among all the redeemed of Yahweh.

These who are redeemed by Yahweh's spirit are also sealed—that is, their eternal life cannot be taken from them—as Paul explains: **“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”** (Ephesians 4:30) No matter what happens to our mortal bodies, our eternal destinies are secure in Christ. **“I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.”** (II Timothy 4:17-18) Paul also expresses **“hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.”** (Titus 1:2) He explains that **“having been justified by His grace we...become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”** (Titus 3:7)

The certainty of eternal life for believers, something that was alluded to only sporadically in the Old Covenant scriptures, is a ubiquitous and unambiguous doctrine in the New. Paul points out the rather obvious fact that if the Jewish leaders had understood that there was life beyond sheol they might have been more careful in choosing their enemies. But eternal life is a doctrine revealed with clarity only in the New Testament—a “mystery,” in his parlance. **“The wisdom of...the rulers of this age...[is] coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’”** (I Corinthians 2:6-9) We can't begin to imagine what heaven is like outside of scriptural revelation, and even when we're told, it's impossible to adequately visualize.

Perhaps this New Testament emphasis on our eternal hope helps explain the differences in outlook between Jews and Christians—the Law and the Prophets *predict* God's plan of redemption, but the Gospels and Epistles *reveal* how it all works out in the real world. If all you've got is the Old Testament—if you don't factor Yahshua's historical role into your thinking—all you're left with is a strange mixture of guilt and hope, the quintessential Jewish mindset. It's like leaving the theater halfway through the movie or putting down the mystery novel before you've found out “who done it.”

Paul isn't the only one who speaks of our eternal destiny as believers. Each of the four gospels report how Yahshua brought it to pass. Indeed, every New Testament writer addresses the subject. **"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."** (Jude 21) **"Having been perfected, [Christ] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."** (Hebrews 5:9. We don't really know who wrote the book of Hebrews—It was probably Paul, but it might have been Apollos or someone else.) **"An entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."** (II Peter 1:11) James said that the man who endures temptation **"will receive the crown of life which Yahweh has promised to those who love Him."** (James 1:12)

John too mentions it—every time he turns around. **"This is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life."** (I John 2:25) Stated another way, **"The truth which abides in us...will be with us forever."** (II John 1) And just in case we missed it, he writes, **"This is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God."** (I John 5:11-13) I don't know how anybody could make it any simpler than that.

And yet, the recurring dream of fallen man is to somehow achieve eternal life *without* Yahweh. How revealing it is that to many, "heaven" is nirvana, an eternal cessation of all feeling, good or bad: *"No hell below us, above us only sky."* The best thing they can conceive of is door number two: death, annihilation, destruction. How sad. But Yahshua made it clear that eternal life *is* possible, and it's defined by knowing Him. He prayed as His crucifixion approached, **"Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."** (John 17:1-3) Not "know *of* you," not "know *about* You," but "*know* You"—it's a personal relationship, not a topic for study and discussion. The only possible alternative to this relationship is eternal separation from "the only true God," one way or the other. This separation will be all the more painful for those who have attached themselves to a spirit other than Yahweh, the "only true God": those in this state *do* know *about* Him, since **"at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth."** (Philippians 2:10)

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Yahshua often made the point that He had come to fulfill Yahweh's promises in the Old Testament—not to start some new religion. He said things like, **“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”** (Matthew 5:17-18, cf. Luke 16:16-17) And **“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”** (Luke 21:33, cf. Mark 13:31) Because of the importance of His “continuity” message, we often miss the truth of the “figure of speech” He uses to provide emphasis—that the heaven and earth we know are temporary. They *will* someday “pass away.”

Just when we're finally gaining enough scientific knowledge to truly appreciate the awesome power of Yahweh through His creation, just when we're coming to grips with the fact that He has the universe so exquisitely balanced that a slight shift in any of a hundred factors would make our life utterly impossible, we learn that God doesn't intend to keep it that way forever. In an earlier chapter, I hypothesized that Yahweh created time, space, and matter (cf. Genesis 1:1) just so we—His intended companions—could have a place to “live” in our mortal bodies. It's the only reason I can think of for God to have gone to all the trouble of creating “the heavens and the earth.” (Somehow I don't think He did it out of boredom.)

But all of this begs the question: once no one inhabits a mortal body anymore, what further need will there be for earth as we know it? Once all of His “friends” have been raised to their new lives in incorruptible bodies and his “enemies” have been given what they always thought they wanted—to be separated from God's inconvenient presence—there will no longer be a need for the things we once considered indispensable: food, water, clothing, shelter, the ground beneath our feet, or the sky above. In the light of Yahweh's love, all of our “needs” will be rendered obsolete. Our new bodies will presumably have all new needs—different needs, spiritual needs. Having observed how God has met our needs in the past—going so far as to create the very elements we are made of—it only seems reasonable to expect that He would continue to meet the needs we will have in our new immortal bodies—even if it means creating a whole new heaven and earth for us. It bears repeating: the wonders of creation—whether the old creation or the new—are not so much an expression of God's power as they are of His love.

Once we get over the shock of the prospect of kissing this world goodbye, we begin to see that none of this should have been particularly surprising. Yahweh has been telling us for thousands of years what He intends to do. Isaiah, for instance, wrote: **“All the host [i.e., stars] of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll. All their host shall fall down as the leaf falls from the vine, and as fruit falling from a fig tree.”** (Isaiah 34:4) Scientists tell us that all stars

(including our sun) have a life cycle—they are born, mature, and die. Isaiah agrees, saying that at some point, God will “roll up the heavens like a scroll,” as if to say, “Your purpose has been fulfilled.”

The prophet goes on to say, **“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment, and those who dwell in it will die in like manner. But My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished.”** (Isaiah 51:6) Creatures of the earth will share in earth’s demise. But we who are mere pilgrims here will find ourselves enjoying a life in Yahweh’s new creation that will never grow old. **“For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,”** says Yahweh, **“So shall your descendants and your name remain.”** (Isaiah 66:22)

This is really getting interesting: Yahweh, it seems, may be getting ready to repeal the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the one that says that the entropy—a measure of the unavailability of energy to do useful work in a closed system—tends to increase with time. In other words, things tend to proceed toward disorder and chaos. This law has been “on the books” since the Big Bang, and all of the scientific data ever collected has tended to confirm it. (And it in itself shatters the theory of undirected organic evolution.) But time and again, the scriptures speak of a time when the decaying universe as we know it will have been replaced by a *permanent* environment for God’s people, one that will not wear out. **“The world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”** (I John 1:17) It’s possible, of course, that this fundamental law of physics will remain in operation, compensated for by the constant provision of Yahweh’s grace—the effect is the same either way.

When the scriptures speak of the “new heavens and new earth,” we should read “heavens” in the classic sense—the sky and the starry universe, not the abode of God. This is made clear in a couple of passages from the Psalms: **“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.”** (Psalm 45:6) God is exempt from the entropy that characterizes our universe, for He is outside (set apart from—read: holy) His own creation. **“You, Yahweh, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail.”** (Psalm 102:25-27, cf. Hebrews 1:8-12) The “new heavens,” can be expected to be much like the heavenly home of Yahweh—i.e., too wonderful for words.

God told us about the new heavens and new earth because if we truly appreciate what’s about to happen, it will have a profound effect on our outlook on life. Peter put it in perspective for us. **“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”** As for

the timing, the “day of Yahweh” in its broadest sense extends from the rapture through the Millennium and beyond. Peter seems to be implying that this re-creation will occur suddenly, immediately after the thousand-year reign (as opposed to it being a leisurely process that Yahweh will unfold over a long period of time). This observation is bolstered by the apparent timing of the first few verses of Revelation 21, which we’ll study shortly. Once the Great White Throne judgment is behind us, there’s no reason for Yahweh to wait any longer with His grand renovation project. But Peter’s reason for telling us about it concerns what we do now, in this life: **“Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”** (II Peter 3:10-13) The lesson is that we shouldn’t get too wrapped up in the things of this world, ’cause they’re about to go poof.

Peter’s mention of “elements” doesn’t necessarily mean the breakdown of atomic structure throughout the galaxy—although it could. Remember, he was writing with a first-century vocabulary. The word *stoicheion* means “something orderly in arrangement,” and by implication, a “fundamental constituent,” ergo, an “element.” So “The elements melting with fervent heat” could mean anything from an enthusiastic remodeling of the earth’s surface to the unmaking of the very fabric of the universe—its disassembly at the sub-atomic level. As we’re about to see, however, God’s new universe *will* include an “earth” where men and nations operate in the light of God’s love for eternity—an earth that bears little resemblance to our present fragile, stormy planet. At the very least, it’s clear that Yahweh has something radically different in mind—a new spiritual environment designed for our new spiritual bodies.

This new environment, whatever form it takes, represents nothing less than the lifting of the curse of sin from Yahweh’s creation. Paul writes, **“For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”** (Romans 8:19-22) The “revealing of the sons (and daughters) of God” is the trigger event for the unveiling of God’s new heaven and new earth. Again, I would correlate this with the moment when the last human mortal is given his resurrection body—at the end of the Millennium.

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I say “unveiling” rather than “creation” because God has apparently *already* built our new environment. The writer of Hebrews listed a succession of faithful men and women whose unwavering belief in Yahweh’s promises was accounted to them as righteousness, but who never lived to see God’s plan unfold. **“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them.... But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”** (Hebrews 11:13, 16) A city? What city would that be, and where is it? Ask yourself: what city in particular does Yahweh say He loves? There’s only one: Jerusalem. We’ve already seen how Jerusalem becomes the premier city of the world during the Millennium—due primarily to the physical presence of King Yahshua. Beyond the thousand-year reign of Christ, however, Yahweh has something a bit grander planned: a new Jerusalem, capital of the new earth—capital of the new universe. **“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy.”** (Isaiah 65:17-18)

John saw the same thing, but in a bit more detail. **“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea....”** This is our first clue of just how radically different this new earth is. At present, three fourths of our planet is covered with salty water and much of the rest is arid, but it apparently was not always so. Hints in the creation and flood records (e.g. Genesis 2:5, 7:11) lead me to the conclusion that the world the antediluvian patriarchs knew may have been quite different than ours, a world of rivers and lakes, where the earth was lush and well watered from springs and heavy mists. A water-vapor canopy (cf. Genesis 1:7) may have blocked the sun’s harmful rays from reaching the ground and kept the surface temperature of the planet at very nearly the same balmy level from the poles to the equator. There were no storms, no deserts, no frozen wastelands. Much of the planet’s water was contained in vast subterranean vaults, far more extensive than the ground water systems that exist today. The vapor canopy could have suspended much more water than our atmosphere is capable of holding today. It is possible (though not explicitly stated) that the “new earth” will be something like that. After all, in its original pristine state, God called His creation “very good” (cf. Genesis 1:31).

And what about this new Jerusalem? **“Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’ Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’”**

(Revelation 21:1-5) Wow! Now that the curse has been lifted, Yahweh pulls out all the stops. Notice several things here: (1) The city descends from heaven (i.e., the abode of God); it is not built upon the surface of the earth. We'll see why in a moment. (2) The city is as beautiful as God knows how to make it, and that's *saying* something. (3) Both Yahshua and His people (some of us, but not all, as we shall see) will live within the city. And (4) it will be a perfect place, totally free of the residual effects of the curse of sin. No wonder the writer to the Hebrews said, **"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come."** (Hebrews 13:14)

John's vision continues. **"And He [i.e., Yahshua, "He who sat on the throne,"] said to me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful.' And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.'" (Revelation 21:5-7)** Here we see the disciple/prophet receiving instruction, encouragement, and a reminder of God's agenda: He wants to bless us, to refresh us, and to have a close, intimate, father-and-child relationship with us.

**"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last [i.e., ultimate] plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God...."** The "bride, the Lamb's wife" is (as we saw back in chapter 25) the Church—those of us whose names are found in the Lamb's Book of Life. It is we who will make the New Jerusalem our home; this magnificent "city" is the location of the "many dwelling places in His Father's household" that Yahshua spoke of going to prepare for us in John 14:2. So here, the city is a picture of the Church itself—not some earthly religious organization, but the *Ekklesia*, the called-out assembly of Yahshua's followers.

**"Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west."** Any thinking Christian will readily acknowledge that the "gateway" to our salvation was Israel—from the faith of Abraham to the sacrifice of Yahshua. But our faith in Yahshua was built on the "foundation" of the labors and sacrifice of His Apostles, also reflected in the architecture of the New Jerusalem: **"Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb...."** One cannot enter the holy city without coming to terms with He who is both the legacy of Israel and the heart of the true Church—Yahshua the Messiah.

The really stunning feature of this “city” is its size. It can’t be remotely compared to any city ever built on earth. **“And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal....”** The word translated “furlong” is the Greek *stadion* (plural: *stadia*), from which we derive our word “stadium.” A *stadion* was 606.75 feet long; so 12,000 *stadia* comes out to 1,379 miles! If you drew a line from Boston to Miami to Laredo to Minneapolis and then back to Boston, you could fit this box inside the borders of the New Jerusalem with miles to spare. But it’s also said to be 1,379 miles *tall*. Clearly, this “city” isn’t going to be sitting on the surface of the earth: it’s roughly five-eighths the size of the moon. And that’s not a bad comparison. It’s sheer mass indicates that Yahweh will place it not *upon* the earth, but *above* it—orbiting the planet like a second moon. Note that since it’s said to “descend out of heaven,” it won’t be made of materials harvested from the earth.

The dimensions given seem to indicate a cube, and it could be. But because of the city’s other architectural features I don’t think this is the case. I’m having a hard time picturing a cube with a wall around it. I envision, rather, a square “ground plan” with one or more mega-structures reaching to a height equal to the width and breadth of the city. It might be a pyramid shape, but I’m thinking (SF9) more in terms of a forest of skyscrapers—like Manhattan on steroids. If it’s put into place as a satellite orbiting the new earth, of course, it wouldn’t have to have a flat “bottom” but could have any conceivable shape within the scripturally mandated overall dimensions. Yahweh is clearly thinking “outside the box” here; there’s no reason for us not to follow His example.

Obviously, I’m guessing at the details, but some specs are spelled out. The city’s massive wall is described next: **“Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.”** (Revelation 21:9-21) If it weren’t for the dimensions given, I’d be tempted to see this whole thing in terms of metaphor. But it’s hard to explain away a 216-foot-high (or possibly *thick*) wall around a city with a ground plane area of almost two million square miles. The dimensions aren’t so important here as the way they’re presented. 144 cubits is 12 by 12: twelve tribes of Israel “multiplied” by twelve apostles of Christ—just as we saw the twelve tribes

“added” to the twelve apostles in the case of the twenty-four elders of Revelation 4:4.

As we have seen, the city has twelve foundations, each one representing one of the apostles. Here we see precious stones associated with each of them as well. Obviously, since the stones are not of earthly origin, they needn't be pinned down to a particular mineral composition. What's important is what they looked like to John. Andreas, bishop of Caesurae, presumed to associate each of these minerals with their respective disciples, but since he had no scriptural support, I won't bore you with his opinion. Note, however, that this isn't the only listing of twelve gemstones in the Bible. In Exodus 28 (repeated in chapter 39) Moses describes the High Priest's ephod. (This was a kind of vest or apron hung from the shoulders and tied at the waist, covering the chest. It's called the “breastplate of judgment” in Exodus 28:29.) Each of its twelve stones bore the name of one of the tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:21). Could it be that these are the same stones, and if so, what do they represent?

At first glance, it's “close, but no cigar.” But remember, Exodus was written in paleo-Hebrew, and Revelation was penned in koine Greek. I'm pretty sure that the lists actually *are* the same. There is no consensus as to precisely what these stones were, however. Some of them seem to be quite similar. Many semi-precious stones have a wide range of appearances, so much so that several of their names are used interchangeably. But like I said, we're trying to see through the eyes of John here. What was he looking at? No one seems to know for sure, and most commentaries don't even attempt to explain them. But they obviously symbolize *something*. Yahweh went to all the trouble of listing them, so I'll give it my best shot. Feel free to disagree with my conclusions if you can come up with something better. They're only guesses, after all.

Jasper. (Greek: *iaspis*; Hebrew: *yashepheh*). The first stone listed in the foundation is the last stone on the ephod. This is a fine-grained, opaque, cryptocrystalline variety of quartz. It is often striped or spotted. Jasper can be red, brown, green, gray-blue, and yellow, but green was particularly valued in ancient times. A variety called bloodstone is dark green with small spots of red (iron oxide) scattered throughout. This is a pretty good picture of the blood of God's perfect sacrifice, Yahshua, sprinkled upon the mercy seat to atone for our sins. He did, after all, describe Himself as “the first and the last” in Revelation 1:11.

Sapphire. (Greek: *sappheiros*; Hebrew *sappiyr*). Listed second in the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem, it was the middle stone on the second row of the ephod. The blue sapphire we know today—a form of corundum, an extremely hard aluminum oxide—was not used until the third century B.C. The “sapphire” of Exodus, then, was more likely the lapis lazuli, a silicate of alumina,

calcium, and sodium. Both stones are a rich, blue color, symbolic of heaven, i.e., our eternal destiny in Christ. (Maybe *that's* why the sky is blue.)

Chalcedony. (Greek: *chalkedon*). The third foundation stone is probably the same as the agate (Hebrew: *shebuw*) listed in the center of the third row of the priestly ephod. Today, chalcedony is a catch-all phrase for a variety of translucent to transparent milky quartz stones with distinctive microscopic crystals arranged in slender fibers in parallel bands. Agate, bloodstone, carnelian, chrysoprase, flint, jasper, and onyx are all varieties of chalcedony. It occurs in a variety of colors ranging from blue-gray to reddish brown to a creamy white. Because of this variety, and since it forms six-sided elongated crystals, my guess is that Yahweh intended this to be representative of mankind, the object of His unfathomable love, in all of our variety, races, and cultures; and the subsequent humanity of Yahshua that enabled Him to rescue us.

Emerald. (Greek: *smaragdos*; Hebrew: *bareqeth*). The fourth foundation stone was found third in the first row on the ephod. Also translated as beryl or carbuncle, the emerald is a hard, brittle gemstone, the most valuable form of beryl (a silicate of beryllium and aluminum). It was used to describe the rainbow surrounding God's throne in Heaven (cf. Revelation 4:3). This description, and the fact that the stone must be oiled to retain its luster, leads me to conclude that the emerald may symbolize our need for the Holy Spirit—God's very presence living within us. We, too, must apply the "oil" of the Spirit to our lives if we wish to gleam for God's glory.

Sardonyx. (Greek: *sardonux*). Listed fifth in the foundation stones, sardonyx was composed of two layers, sard, or sardius—a translucent deep red or red-orange form of chalcedony—and onyx, a white form of calcium carbonate soft enough to be easily carved. Onyx (Hebrew: *shoham*) was listed in the middle of the fourth row of the ephod. Sardonyx was prized for making cameos and signet rings—the soft onyx carving standing out against the red sardius background. Signet rings, of course, were used for impressing the owner's seal into hot wax—a means of identification, proof of ownership, and exercise of authority. The sardonyx, then symbolizes our being "sealed" by Yahshua—the red of the sardius represents His blood, while the white onyx speaks of His purity.

Sardius. (Greek: *sardios*; Hebrew: *'odem*). As we have seen, this red form of chalcedony represents the blood of Yahshua, shed for our sins. Its hexagonal crystalline structure speaks again of His humanity, for the blood of sacrificial animals was never sufficient to atone for our transgressions. This stone was sixth in the city's foundation, and first in the top row of the ephod. It is also translated carnelian, ruby, and garnet.

Chrysolite. (Greek *chrusolithos*). Mentioned in position number seven in the wall of New Jerusalem, this stone was gold in color (*chrusos*=gold; *lithos*=stone),

indicative of the unfathomable riches of God’s love toward us. It is probably the NKJV’s “beryl,” or yellow jasper (Hebrew: *tarshiysh*) listed as the first stone of the bottom row of the High Priest’s ephod.

Beryl. (Greek: *berullos*). This is a transparent or translucent gemstone, colorless to pale blue-green, also known as aquamarine. It is in position number eight in the foundation wall. This is quite possibly the “diamond” (also translated emerald and white moonstone—Hebrew: *yahalom*) listed last in the second row of the ephod’s gems. What does it symbolize? Have you ever seen the crystal-clear seawater off the Bahamas? (Me neither, but I’ve seen pictures.) The pristine ocean—the color of *berullos*—always reminds me of Yahweh’s loving provision for us—the exquisite balance of earth and water, heat and cold, gravity and momentum. From the first moment of creation, Yahweh’s goal was to build an environment for us to live in that He could call “very good.” This is what I see when I contemplate beryl.

Topaz. (Greek: *topazion*; Hebrew: *pitdah*). Foundation stone number nine, and centered in the top row of the ephod, is topaz. This is a form of quartz that has, through being heated, changed color—generally from a citrine or smoky quartz to a pale yellow (although other varieties exist—blue, brown, pink, or even colorless). According to *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary*, topaz “is almost as hard as the diamond. It has the power of double refraction, and when heated or rubbed becomes electric.” The symbol it presents (to me at least) is Yahshua’s work in us through the testing of this world: our God ensures that rather than destroying us, the tribulation we endure makes us more useful, more beautiful, and infinitely more valuable.

Chrysoprase. (Greek: *chrusoprasos*; Hebrew: *nophek*). Listed tenth among the foundation stones and first in the second row of the ephod, chrysoprase is the most highly valued form of chalcedony (whose hexagonal crystal structure, you’ll recall, indicates humanity). *Chrusos*, as we saw, means “gold,” and *prasos* means “leek,” as in the vegetable. The name thus indicates the golden-green color of this translucent gemstone. Also known as Australian jade, it’s often translated “turquoise” in Old Testament passages (emerald in the KJV). To my mind, it symbolizes the fruit of the Spirit in the believer’s life: love. (The rest of the Galatians 5 list—joy, peace, patience, etc.—is a description of love.) I realize some of my symbolic interpretations might seem like a stretch. Feel free to prayerfully consider alternate views.

Jacinth. (Greek: *huakinthos*; Hebrew: *leshem*). The name of this stone is derived from the hyacinth, a flower of deep blue or violet, though the stone itself ranges from colorless to yellow to golden brown in color. It was listed the eleventh of the foundation stones, and is found first in the third row of ephod stones. It is also translated amber or ligure. Jacinth is a form of zircon, a beautiful

transparent natural gem (not to be confused with the synthetic “cubic zirconia”). Perhaps this is what John saw when he described the New Jerusalem and its street as “pure gold, like clear glass.” (Revelation 21:18, 21) If so, it symbolizes our glorious future in the “dwelling places” Yahshua has prepared for us.

Amethyst. (Greek: *amethystos*; Hebrew: *'achlamah*). The final stone in the city’s foundation was listed last in the third row of the ephod. The Greek name meant “not drunk,” because (according to Pliny) its color (lilac, mauve, or purple) approached that of wine but didn’t quite get there. The color, though, is the likely key to its symbolism: purple is the symbol of royalty (because purple dye, made from the murex shellfish, was rare and expensive). Also, amethysts are crystals formed within geodes: they are thus separate (read: holy) from the rocks around them. Amethyst, then, is the symbol of divine royalty, Yahshua—and through Him of the redeemed, described as a “royal priesthood” in I Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6.

My ruminations on the subject are all highly speculative, of course, but no more so that those of Rabanus Maurus (786-856), Archbishop of Mainz: “In the jasper is figured the truth of faith; in the sapphire, the height of celestial hope; in the chalcedony, the flame of inner charity. In the emerald is expressed the strength of faith in adversity; in the sardonyx, the humility of the saints in spite of their virtues; in the sard, the venerable blood of the martyrs. In the chrysolite, indeed, is shown true spiritual preaching accompanied by miracles; in the beryl, the perfect operation of prophecy; in the topaz, the ardent contemplation of the prophecies. Lastly, in the chrysoprase is demonstrated the work of the blessed martyrs and their reward; in the hyacinth [jacinth], the celestial rapture of the learned in their high thoughts and humble descent to human things out of regard for the weak; in the amethyst, the constant thought of the heavenly kingdom in humble souls.”

John’s description of the celestial city continues: **“But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple....”** The temple was a place for sacrifices to be performed—either in anticipation of the coming Messiah, or, as revealed in the closing chapters of the Book of Ezekiel, in memory of that same pivotal moment celebrated during the Millennial reign of Christ. But now, when there is no one left who has yet to choose between life and death, there is no longer any need or function for a temple. Indeed, the Lamb of God will dwell forever among men—a living temple reminding us of Yahweh’s eternal love.

**“The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or**

**causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.”** (Revelation 21:22-27) Here we get a glimpse of the relationship between the New Jerusalem and the New Earth. First, the sun does not provide light or energy for the celestial city; rather, the Lamb Himself, within the city, is the light source. Note that the sun isn't necessarily gone at this point (though it could be). But it is certainly superfluous—no longer required for life or light on earth.

Second, the “satellite” concept is supported by the language of this passage. Not only does the glory of God illuminate the city, He also provides light for the New Earth beneath. The nations—all of the peoples inhabiting the New Earth—will bask in its light. These, you'll recall, are no longer mortals, but will have received their resurrection bodies at the close of the Millennium, just as the Old Testament Saints and the Church did at the rapture.

Third, their respective populations differ. The New Jerusalem, as we have seen, is the eternal home of the *ekklesia*, the Bride of Christ. (The Old Testament gentile saints, like Abel, Seth, Noah, Rahab, and Ruth, and Naaman may be included, but we aren't specifically told.) The New Earth is therefore “heaven” to the redeemed multitudes of the Millennium. These comprise the “nations,” of whom the premier member is Israel (presumably both its Old and New Testament saints who are not included in the *ekklesia*, though again, the scriptures don't say). The “kings of the earth” mentioned above are those who proved themselves worthy during their sojourn as mortals upon the old earth during the Millennium, “laying up for themselves,” as Yahshua put it, “treasures in heaven.” (The inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, in contrast, are *all* described as “kings and priests” in Revelation 1:6.)

Fourth, there is “commerce” of some kind between the New Earth and the New Jerusalem. The nations of the New Earth, led by their “kings,” will freely visit the celestial city, bringing glory and honor to the Lamb. The twelve “pearly gates” are symbolic of the great price Yahshua paid for our redemption. They are not there to shut out evil (as is the usual function of city gates), for the entire universe has been made holy at this point—it no longer “groans and travails” (cf. Romans 8:22) as it once did.

I believe, however (SF2), that space travel won't be restricted to shuttling back and forth between these two places. Although the New Jerusalem and New Earth are our eternal “home,” wouldn't it be wonderful to visit the far-flung reaches of Yahweh's universe, the New Heaven, never ceasing to learn new things about His greatness? To tour God's creation would be an incredible experience—but to have the Creator Himself as our tour guide would be even more “heavenly.” In our immortal resurrection bodies, of course, we wouldn't be saddled with the physical limitations that hold us back now. We won't necessarily even require complicated machines and eons of time to make these journeys. But

every day that goes by—for all of eternity—our knowledge and appreciation for Yahweh will increase—and with it, our ability to love Him.

**“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations, and there shall be no more curse....”**

The river of life is reminiscent of the twin rivers that flowed east and west from the Millennial temple (cf. Ezekiel 47), rivers that restored the old world’s dead oceans and even healed the Dead Sea. This river, though, flows directly from the throne of God in the New Jerusalem. The river is surely symbolic of the grace of Yahweh, the spiritual water that alone can satisfy our thirst for righteousness. And the tree of life symbolizes that same grace, which heals the damage we have done to ourselves. But I see no reason to suppose that these aren’t also literal features of the heavenly landscape.

The twelve annual crops grown upon trees of life is again symbolic of the legacy of both the twelve Jewish tribes and the twelve apostles of the Messiah, i.e., Israel and the Ekklesia. A tree of life was also present in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, because it represents eternal life, it was the immediate reason Adam and Eve had to be expelled. Attaining everlasting life while clothed in a mortal, sinful body would be the worst of curses—ask any octogenarian. But now, in the New Jerusalem, the tree’s fruit is available for nourishment and enjoyment to all whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, people who now inhabit bodies that are designed to last forever. The leaves of the tree of life symbolize the removal of the curse of sin from our lives.

**“But the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it [that is, in the city], and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.”** (Revelation 22:1-5) Within the New Jerusalem, those who reign are those who serve. That’s the pattern Yahshua established for us, and it should be the model for human governments in this world (though it seldom is, to the shame of those who hold the reins of power).

Back in chapter 4, we talked about the promises made to “him who overcomes” in the seven churches that represent the future history of the *ekklesia* (see Revelation 2 and 3). Here we see those same promises being fulfilled. To reprise, Yahshua had said, **“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.... He shall not be hurt by the second death.... I will give [him] some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.... [He] shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.... I will make him a pillar in**

**the temple of My God** [as we have seen, no longer a physical location, but the Lamb Himself], and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.... I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne....” Those of the Church age who were “overcomers” are the same souls now seen living in the New Jerusalem.

Returning to Revelation’s final chapter, we read: **“Then he [the angel] said to me, ‘These words are faithful and true.’ And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.”** We are coming to the end of our story; we have seen and heard thousands of these “things.” But they all boil down to one astounding truth: **“Behold, I [Yahshua] am coming quickly [i.e., suddenly]! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”** (Revelation 22:6-7) “Blessed” (Greek: *makarios*) means “supremely blest, fortunate, well off, happy.” He is not necessarily blessed who merely hears these words of prophecy—it is rather he who *keeps* them. “Keep” is the Greek *tereo*, which means to guard from loss by constant watchfulness, to observe attentively, to take careful note of, to keep the eyes fixed upon—things I’ve been trying to do for the past 900-plus pages. Now that we know what Yahweh is about to do, and why, (and probably even *when*) we must not take our eyes off these truths, even for a moment. The time for pedantic theological cogitation has come and gone. We must stop confusing tradition with faith, stop compromising with the world, stop sleeping on the job. Like Lot, we who are living settled and secure in Sodom must prepare to flee. There is fire and brimstone just over the horizon. We are almost out of time.

As the vision came to an end, John was so moved, he didn’t know quite what to do. **“Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.’”** Natural response, though wrong object. Can you really blame him? Who could retain his composure upon seeing these things? **“And he said to me, ‘Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.’”** (Revelation 22:8-11) Many years before, Daniel had been told that the prophecies he had seen would be **“closed up and sealed until the time of the end.”** (Daniel 12:9) John was told no such thing: his vision was imminent—his readers were to treat it as if it could come to pass at any time. The fact that nearly two thousand years have gone by since then doesn’t change anything.

The next admonition, that against trying to change people’s behavior from the outside in, is one we would be wise to heed in these Last Days. The angel

reiterates God's great gift to mankind: choice. He says, in effect, *Go ahead and do what you want. Your deeds will reveal what you believe and whose you are.* It has always been a thankless task trying to "legislate morality," whether through law or social pressure. Real change must come from the inside—from the Holy Spirit living within—if it is to come at all. There may have been some rationale for forcing people to behave themselves a few hundred years ago, when keeping a lid on society's overt sin made life a little safer and more conducive to growth for God's people. But as the days grow short, trying to wring good conduct out of lost souls is pointless and counterproductive. "Holy" means separate, not well-behaved. Our instructions are the same as they've always been: preach the gospel, reflect God's love, and keep ourselves separated to Yahweh—in the world, but not *of* it.

Yahshua ends this most astonishing vision by reminding John who He is and why He has told him all this: "**Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last...**" One final time, Yahshua is telling us that He *is* Yahweh—He who is self-existent, eternal, the source and conclusion of all things. As such, He alone is worthy to judge our works.

Like any father, God judges His own children's works on an entirely different basis than those of strangers. And no amount of good work is sufficient to transform a stranger into a child of Yahweh. You have to be "born" (by adoption) into His family—you have to *want* to have a relationship with the Father. But once that relationship is established, our works mean a great deal to Him—not so much for their intrinsic value, but for the spirit in which they were done. If the "picture" we've painted for Papa was done with love and sincere effort, He'll proudly put it up on the celestial refrigerator, even if we're not all that talented. If all we've produced is a hasty, careless scrawl, drawn out of duty or self-indulgence, He'll set it aside, for He knows the difference. But what about the pictures other people's children have painted? Even if they're real masterpieces, there's no particular reason God should care. It doesn't matter how "good" they are. He's only interested in what His own kids have done.

Stated another way, "**Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie....**" Only the children have access to their Father. Strangers—those souls, identified by their works, who willfully rejected the opportunity to become children of God—are left "outside," ultimately reduced to nonexistence or worse, living in hell.

Again we hear from Yahshua: "**I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning**

**Star....”** We are again reminded of Yahshua’s credentials, being both the root of David (i.e., Yahweh Himself) and his offspring, the promised Messiah. The “bright and morning star” was promised to those who overcame the world and kept His word until the end (cf. Revelation 2:28). Yahshua, the bright morning star, is the authentic original that Lucifer tried so unsuccessfully to counterfeit all these years. Satan’s pitiful efforts to “be like God” now serve only to emphasize the glory of the genuine Messiah.

**“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely....”** This relationship with God is available freely to anyone who desires to have it. It’s not the exclusive province of perfect people (they don’t exist) or Jews or Protestants or Americans or Caucasians or rich people or poor folks—or any other artificially contrived subset of humanity. Yahweh doesn’t want anyone to perish; rather, He desires that everyone would repent and become His children. The invitation to come and drink of the water of life is extended by the Holy Spirit, as it has always been, but also by Yahshua’s bride, the called-out assembly of believers who have put their faith in Yahshua.

John adds a warning to those who would tamper with this vision, intending to use it to promote their own agenda: **“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book....”** I, for one, take that very seriously, which is why I have kept the Biblical text clearly differentiated from my own thoughts. I pray that this study has helped you better understand what Yahweh has planned for us. And I pray that you may be filled, as I am, with the joyful anticipation and sure knowledge of His coming.

**“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”** (Revelation 22:12-20) Amen indeed. Let it be so!

## Epilogue

So what now? Now that you've seen what the Scriptures have to say about your future, what are you supposed to do about it? The answer depends on who you are and when you're reading this.

The most fundamental question to be asked is: do you have a relationship with Yahweh? You now know quite a lot *about* Him, but do you *know* Him? He would like to “adopt” every human being on this planet—make us all His children. He has already “filed the paperwork” and paid all the outrageous fees. All we have to do is say yes, admit that we're homeless orphans, admit that we need a place to stay, that we want a loving father who will provide for us, that we can't make it on our own, and that we choose to be His children. Be very clear on that point: the choice is ours. If you will choose Yahweh, then He will choose you. It's as simple as that. But if you refuse to come in from the cold, I have no further advice for you. There is no alternate reality that will provide you with the shelter and warmth you seek.

From this point on, then, I am assuming that everyone reading this is a child of Yahweh. (Frankly, I can't imagine anyone getting beyond the first or second chapter who wasn't.) The question remains. What are we supposed to do in light of all this prophetic revelation? Again, it depends—this time on the lateness of the hour. If the rapture has not yet taken place, our instructions are the same as they've always been. In case you've forgotten (or never knew) what these instructions are, I'll restate them as simply as possible. (But unquestionably more helpful than my list is the book of I John. It's only five chapters; I'll wait while you go and re-read it.)

(1) Communicate with your Heavenly Father. Talk to Him. Listen to Him. Take the time to learn what He's all about by reading the Scriptures. Carry on a running conversation with Yahweh, and be prepared to accept what His Spirit tells you, either through His word, through the opening of doors in your life, or even directly (the prophet Joel tells us to expect dreams and visions from the Spirit as the Day of Yahweh approaches). The caveat with dreams and visions, of course, is that they must line up with the truth of Yahweh's scripture—you shouldn't base doctrine on the effects of late night pepperoni pizza.

(2) Love each other. When you encounter someone in spiritual or material need, meet that need, if it's in your power. If it's not, pray for it. Treat others with the same kindness, respect, and honesty you show yourself. This applies to everyone in your sphere of contact, but especially to fellow believers: our love for each other is supposed to be what sets us apart from the world.

(3) Be holy; that is, separate yourself from the world's influence. Maintain a pilgrim mentality, for our citizenship is not of this world. Filter everything you hear through the truth of scripture. Don't confuse earning a living with life itself. Do what you can to improve conditions for your fellow man, but don't confuse good works with holiness. Read the works of godly men and women, but don't confuse their writings with holy scripture. Vote if you want to, but don't confuse your candidate with Christ.

(4) Stop tolerating false doctrine. Tell the unvarnished truth, even if it's not popular. Loving one's neighbor doesn't mean sending him to hell out of "respect for his point of view." No matter what the politicians and the media say, we do *not* all worship the same god. Yahweh doesn't share His throne with Ba'al. I'm not talking about being dogmatic about fine points of scriptural interpretation—like conflicting views on the chronology of the rapture, for instance. But certain truths are foundational: the deity of Yahshua, His atoning sacrifice, our need for salvation. Don't compromise or dilute your faith in these matters for any reason. But at the same time, don't confuse guarding God's truth in the world with forcing the heathen to behave themselves. These are two different things—the first one essential, and the second pointless.

(5) Don't exalt religious tradition over scriptural truth. Be honest with yourself: if your "religion" depends on rituals and conventions rather than your relationship with Yahweh, then something's wrong. Question everything that's not spelled out in Scripture, and be prepared to challenge habits you've taken a lifetime to form. Personally, I agonize over things I suspect are wrong but know I'll never be able to change: man-made traditions like Sunday worship and the observance of Christmas in December. Begin paying attention to the significance of the seven annual Feasts of Yahweh. Trust the Scriptures but don't trust the translations: look up the Hebrew and Greek words. Dig deep. Spend time. You'll find that our English translations time and again fail to communicate the full impact of Yahweh's Word, and far too often they miss the truth all together.

(6) Support Israel. Yahweh wasn't kidding when He told us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Evangelical Christians are the only real ally Israel has in today's world. As we approach the end, both of us will find ourselves isolated, misunderstood, and persecuted. But Yahweh's "exit strategy" for the Ekklesia will predate Israel's by at least seven years, perhaps longer. What we do for Israel now will come to remembrance when they enter the Time of Jacob's Trouble. The Battle of Magog will turn them back to Yahweh, but their recollection of our love and support will prepare them for the epiphany of the Day of Atonement—four or five years later—when they will recognize their Messiah as the same One *we* worshiped when we walked the earth.

(7) Rejoice. No matter how bad things get between now and the end of the beginning, remember that you are a child of the King. Your sins have been forgiven, and a wonderful eternity awaits you. Satan's pitiful schemes can have no lasting effect on your life, for unlike him and his followers, you are destined for blessed immortality, a participant in the glory of God Himself. So again I say, rejoice!

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I know it's unlikely, but what if the rapture has already taken place when you stumble across these pages? Millions of Christians have suddenly disappeared, leaving the world wondering what happened. You'll know I got that part right, at least. And having read the rest of the book, you've discovered that you've now got a problem: you've missed the only chance you had to live your life out "normally." The rapture, having been foretold in the Scriptures, proves that God has at last begun to bring His revealed plan to fruition. The rest of Biblical prophecy will now be fulfilled in quick succession.

As before, the first thing you need to do is repent, acknowledge your sin, and ask God to forgive you and save you. He will, even now. Again, if you refuse to accept the grace of Yahweh, there's nothing more I can say to you. But assuming you have taken that step, welcome to the Assembly of Laodicea. The good news is that you are now a child of Yahweh. The bad news is that your chances of making it through to the end of the Tribulation in one piece are slim to the point of anorexia—though some will.

The first thing we need to do is review the only instructions God left specifically for you. I'm referring to Yahshua's letter to the Church at Laodicea, recorded in Revelation 3. You have already heeded His invitation: "**Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.**" The promise He made at this point is meant to encourage you in the coming trial: "**To him who overcomes [that's you] I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.**" (Revelation 3:20-21) That's a pretty neat promise.

I'll skip the part where Yahshua reminds you how you got into this fix (beginning in verse 14), and cut straight to His advice: "**I counsel you to buy from Me gold [heavenly riches: love, joy, peace, patience] refined in the fire [i.e., tested and purified by the trials you're about to endure], that you may be rich; and white garments [imputed righteousness, provided by the blood of Yahshua], that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed [i.e., that God would choose not to see your sin]; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see [that**

is, open your eyes to the reality of your situation]. **As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.** [In other words, your tardiness in repentance has sent you to God's woodshed, and you're about to get spanked. The unrepentant world, however, is in for something far worse—a fate worse than death.] **Therefore be zealous** [once you've made up your mind to follow Yahweh: don't waver in your commitment] **and repent** [change direction from where you were headed before you found God]." (Revelation 3:18-19)

Now that you're a believer, the seven goals I listed above apply to you as well, but the list is slanted somewhat to reflect your new situation. The first three (prayer, love, and holiness—being set apart) stand unchanged. Developing a holy intolerance for false doctrine will be simplified somewhat, for such heresies will be easier to spot as the end approaches. The key is the first commandment: **"I am Yahweh your God.... You shall have no other gods before me."** (Exodus 20:1-2) Indeed, the world will for a time tolerate every point of view but yours, and every god but the real One. Your relationship with Yahweh will classify you as an ultra-right-wing fundamentalist whacko at best, and a dangerous and subversive religious terrorist at worst. The very idea that you have convictions based on a relationship with a God who requires holiness will be seen as antisocial behavior, the worst sort of bigotry—a hate crime. It will only be a matter of time before "your brand" of Christianity is outlawed, persecuted, and punished.

As for refusing to let religion replace relationship, that issue will more or less take care of itself. You won't find "your kind" welcome in fancy cathedrals with stained-glass windows. The Laodicean Ekklesia will, like some in the early church, find themselves back in the catacombs (so to speak), hiding out from a world that irrationally hates it. But in that, you can still rejoice, for they hated your Savior as well: you're in good company. Consider it an honor to be reviled by evil people because you are not like them—even though your goodness is only borrowed, derived from the sacrificial blood of the Messiah who died for your sins.

And what about supporting Israel? As you now know, her fate has been foretold by Yahweh's prophets. If a charismatic world leader has arisen from somewhere in the old Roman empire (nobody's going to be calling him "the Antichrist," you understand), the implementation of his plan to guarantee Israel's security for seven years is what begins the Tribulation. Supporting Israel at this time is no longer a matter of writing to your Congressman or even praying for the peace of Jerusalem. It is now a personal affair.

If you're a gentile, Yahweh wants you to protect the Jews in your personal sphere of influence from anti-Semitic attacks. If it entails breaking the law to do this, then break the law. Shelter them, feed them, equip them, and console them to the best of your ability, for in so doing, you will be supporting the Messiah

Himself, as far as He's concerned. This kind of activity will, at times, be risky—increasingly so as the Tribulation reaches the mid-point. But you've read the scriptures; you know how it all ends. Take courage and do what you know is right—or more to the point, what you know the coming King wants you to do.

If you're a Jew, the course of action I'd recommend is a bit different. Don't resist official attempts to repatriate you and your family to Israel. As dangerous as things look there, it's the safest place you could be. Yahweh Himself will be fighting your battles for you, though things will look unbelievably grim for the final three and a half years—getting so bad that you and your countrymen will have to hide out in the wilderness. As a “believing” Jew, you're going to be in the minority at first. Do what you can to teach your fellow Jews about God's plan of restoration for them, and prepare them for the shock of their lives: Yahshua—Jesus—is their Messiah. They will all (i.e., the one third of the Jews who survive) come to know this eventually, on the final Day of Atonement, but there's no reason to keep the epiphany a secret until the big day.

Whatever happens, *do not* buy into any plan ostensibly invented to manage commerce and control crime through the implementation of a world-wide system that requires any kind of oath, mark, or personal biometric identifier. It will entail submission to a single man and his government, and will probably include some overt form of Satan worship, whether under the name Lucifer, Halal, or Allah. Even if the authorities promise to hunt down conscientious objectors to this scheme and cut their heads off, *don't accept this system*: it's the mark of the Beast. You have been warned.

As gruesome as the carnage will be during the Tribulation, some will make it alive into the seventh Millennium. Before you are 45 days (cf. Daniel 12:11, 12) into the Millennium, however, the “sheep” who took care of Yahshua's “brethren” will be separated from the “goats,” who did not, and the goats will be slain. Whoever is left will be the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ—whose job it will be to be fruitful and replenish the earth. This all leads me to the conclusion that Yahweh wants you to at least try to survive the bad times.

Remember, I'm talking to people who have missed the rapture but who have subsequently repented and become children of Yahshua. Knowing how long it will last is going to be important information: it won't last forever—don't give up. The Messiah's reign will begin precisely 2,520 days after the Antichrist “confirms a covenant with many”—i.e., guarantees Israel's security through a seven-year treaty. What should you be doing to increase your chances of making through to the end alive?

(1) I'd suggest developing some survival skills. Learn how to live outdoors, live off the land. Buy camping equipment and learn how to use it. Stock up on foods packaged to keep indefinitely. Learn how to hunt and trap.

(2) Move away from major population centers and military installations. The war of Magog (precipitating World War III) will hit these places the hardest.

(3) Don't trust *anything* you hear through official media channels. Just because you're paranoid, it doesn't mean they *aren't* out to get you.

(4) Filter your perception of reality through the plain teaching of the scriptures. Of course, the rub there is that you're a new Christian and presumably don't know much. So get a Bible, read it, learn, and listen for the leading of the Holy Spirit.

(5) If you encounter other Christians or Jews, help them in whatever ways you can.

(6) Resist the temptation to strike back against those who are persecuting you. Rather, recognize that Babylon has grown strong. Rest assured, it's only temporary. Our instructions are to flee, not fight. If you're caught, speak out boldly in the name of Yahshua. He will give you the right words when the time comes.

(7) Finally, don't hold onto your mortal life too dearly. Spiritual compromise is far worse than physical death. Many more will die than will live. If you don't make it alive into the Millennium, you can still look forward to a new, immortal body and the opportunity to live with Yahshua forever. Yahweh has promised you eternal life. He's never broken a promise. He's not going to start now.